# THE LION AND THE LAMB

# THE LION AND THE LAMB

By

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

P. F. COLLIER & SON COMPANY
NEW YORK

*Copyright, 1929, 1930,*
By E. Phillips Oppenheim

*All rights reserved*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

# THE LION AND THE LAMB

## CHAPTER I

At exactly ten minutes past nine on a gusty spring morning, the postern gate in the huge door of Wandsworth Prison was pushed open, and David Newberry, for the first time in many months, lifted his head and drew in a long gulp of the moist west wind. His original, half-shamefaced intention of hurrying into the obscurity of the moving crowds was instantly shaken. He was cut adrift from the prison by that closed door, and nobody seemed to be taking any notice of him. Nothing seemed to matter except that this was freedom. When, a few moments later, he squared his shoulders and proceeded on his way, the miraculous had happened. He had lost his sense of self-consciousness, there was a certain eagerness in his footsteps, he was on his way back into life, and there were still things which were worth while.

A young man, on the other side of the road, who had been talking to some one in a stationary taxicab, broke off his conversation, crossed the thoroughfare, and presently accosted him.

"Hullo, Dave!"

David Newberry eyed the speaker with an air of gloomy disgust. He came to a standstill unwillingly.

"What do you want, Reuben?" he asked.

"I like that," was the jaunty response. "What do you suppose I want, but you? Tottie Green isn't the man to let any of his lads down. There's a taxicab engaged," he added, pointing across the way, "and a spread at The Lion and the Lamb. We'd have made it the Trocadero if

we could, but I expect they'll be keeping an eye on you for a time. Lem's over there, waiting."

"You can ride back in the taxi with Lem then, and eat the spread," David Newberry rejoined. "I want nothing more to do with you, or Lem, or Tottie Green."

Reuben laid his hand on his companion's shoulder. He was a tall, dark young man, whose clothes fitted him almost too well, sallow-faced, with sharp features, and the persuasive voice of one who has started life as a well-educated huckster.

"Dave, old man, you've got to get rid of that stuff quick," he begged. "Tottie just had to let you down. If he'd sent you even a lawyer, they'd have traced it back to us directly. Then, as regards Lem and me, it would have been a three years' job for either of us, and," he added, dropping his voice, "it might even have meant the swinging room for Lem. You got off with six months as a first offender. What's six months, anyway? There's your money in the bank and the boys waiting to see you."

David Newberry shook himself free from the other's grasp.

"You heard what I said," he repeated. "Get back to your Lem and your taxi, and leave me alone."

Reuben made no movement. His manner became even more urgent.

"You've got to get all that out of your head, Dave," he insisted. "The old man's waiting there, and Belle is all fussed up at the idea of seeing you again. Make up your mind to it. You've got to come back with me. Here comes Lem, to find out what's the matter."

"See that policeman?" the newcomer into the world pointed out. "I don't want to be in trouble again for brawling in the street, or I'd knock you down. I'm going to call him."

The man who had crossed the road presented himself — an unpleasant-looking person, with the square shoulders, the bulbous ears, and the cruel mouth of a prize fighter, which, indeed had been his profession. He grinned at David — not a pleasant expression, for his yellow, broken teeth and the sidewise withdrawal of his lips were alike unprepossessing.

"How goes it, Dave, old man?" he demanded, with a certain note of bluster in his tone. "What about a move, eh?"

"I wish to the devil you would move off, both of you," was the bitter reply. "I have told Reuben here I want nothing more to do with Tottie Green or any of you. You're a set of quitters, and I'm through with you."

The grin this time more closely resembled a snarl.

"Stop your kidding," the ex-prize fighter enjoined. "I tell you your money's waiting — a hundred and seventy-five quid — not a penny docked. The old man's going to hand it over to you himself. There's a drop of Scotch too, in the taxi."

David Newberry drew himself up, and there became even more apparent a very singular and remarkable difference between the three young men, as would have seemed almost natural, if their family histories had been known.

"Get this into your muddy brains, you fools, if you can," he said firmly. "I've done with Tottie Green, done with all of you — except you, Lem, and you, Reuben. There's a little understanding due between us that's got to come; otherwise I never want to see any of your ugly faces again. Clear out!"

The deportment of Tottie Green's second ambassador suddenly changed. He became truculent, if not menacing. He drew nearer to David, who avoided him with disgust.

"You just get this into your silly nut, Dave," he coun-

tered. "You're one of Tottie's men, and you don't quit till he says the word. There's been one or two who tried, and they got theirs sweet and proper. Try it on, if you want to. You'll feel the tickle of a knife in your ribs or the catgut round your throat before you've found your way to Scotland Yard. Come along, young fellow. You don't want us to have to buy that blooming taxi, do you?"

Cannon Ball Lem had been a fair, middle-weight boxer in his time, and he sidled up to David in unpleasantly aggressive fashion. The latter took a quick step sideways and touched a policeman on the shoulder.

"Constable," he complained, "this man is annoying and threatening me. I am just out of prison, and I haven't any desire to go back again. Will you please see that these two leave me alone."

The policeman, favourably impressed by David's voice and manner, turned promptly around. The two ambassadors from the unseen power, however, were already disappearing into the taxicab. David raised his cap.

"Many thanks, Constable," he said. "Cannon Ball Lem they used to call that young man, and he certainly had a fair idea of using his fists. I didn't want to be knocked about the first day I was out of prison."

The man grinned.

"Now that you're free, you choose your company," he advised.

David Newberry, absorbed soon in the traffic of the broader thoroughfares, went about his business with a slightly relaxed sense of tension. His first call was at a tobacconist's shop, where he purchased two packets of Virginian cigarettes and a box of matches. In the doorway, he paused to light one of the former, and his whole expression softened as he slowly inhaled the smoke and

tasted for the first time for many months the joy of tobacco. Presently he summoned a taxicab, and having decided, after a seemingly casual glance up and down the street, that he was not being followed, directed the man to drive to the Strand. At a second-hand shop in this neighbourhood, he purchased a leather trunk, slightly soiled but of very superior quality, a kit bag, and a fitted dressing case, for all of which articles he paid from a bulky roll of bank notes. He drove on to a famous emporium for the sale of misfits and second-hand clothes, where, being fortunately of almost stock size, he was able to purchase a complete and expensive wardrobe, the whole of which he took away with him in his trunk. From an outfitter's, close at hand, he bought sparingly of linen and ties, having the air, whilst he made his selection, of one who is more at home in the chaster atmosphere of Bond Street. He was then driven to the Milan Hotel, where he engaged, without any trouble, a small bachelor suite in the Court. With his luggage stowed away, and the porters duly tipped, he descended to the barber's shop, and for an hour submitted himself to the complete ministrations of the establishment. At precisely midday, he took his first drink for many months — no crude affair of whisky from a bottle in a mouldy taxicab, but a double dry Martini cocktail, served in a thin wineglass with tapering stem, cloudy and cold. The unaccustomed sting of the alcohol seemed further to humanise him. He mounted in the lift to his rooms, a glow in his blood, his sense of freedom now become a realisable and glorious thing.

Seated in an easy-chair, with a cigarette between his lips, he glanced through the telephone book and asked for the number of Messrs. Tweedy, Atkinson and Tweedy, Solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn. Mr. Atkinson, for whom he enquired under the name of David Newberry, was prompt

in response. His voice over the telephone sounded urgent and anxious.

"This is Atkinson speaking. Is that — er — er — h'm — ?"

"This is David Newberry," the young man snapped. "Please remember that that is the name and the style in which I wish to be addressed. When can I see you?"

"At any time you choose," was the prompt response.

"In half an hour?"

"Certainly, if I can get to Wandsworth in that time. You are still, I presume — "

"I'm out," David interrupted curtly, "or I shouldn't be telephoning. Three days short for good conduct. Milan Court 128."

"Fortunately, my car is waiting," the lawyer confided. "I shall be with you almost at once."

His client rang off. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking eastward over the bare tops of the trees at the misty, grey-domed churches and the solid new buildings slowly creeping up. There was a gleam of the river to the right, white-flecked and swirling, a scurry of dried brown leaves on the bosom of the tempestuous wind. In detail, he saw nothing. It was a great moment for him, a moment in which he needed all his self-control, all his imagination, all his resolution. Before him lay, if he chose to take it, the broad way of an easy life, a life of forgetfulness and oblivion to all he had suffered, forgiveness — negative at any rate — of the cowards who were responsible for those lost months, and that cloud of disgrace from which he could never wholly escape. He was too strong a character to be frequently subject to these spasms of self-pity, but in those few luminous moments he was acutely conscious of the flagrant acts of injustice on the part of others — his own kith and kin — who were,

after all, responsible for his disaster. Even their death seemed to matter very little. The evil was done. It was hard for him to believe that a time might arrive when he would bear them no ill will. Before that time could arrive, life would have to be kinder to him, would have to thaw the bitterness in his heart and melt the blood which he still felt cold in his veins. There was always the chance that he might become a human being again, but in this period of detachment, when only the past was of account, it seemed to him a curiously remote possibility.

## CHAPTER II

In due course, there was a ring at the bell, and in response to David's invitation, a middle-aged, very well-dressed, portentous-looking gentleman, his right hand outstretched, and carrying a small black bag in his left, entered the room. Behind him, following a little diffidently, and with a despatch box under his arm, was another person of obviously less consequence. His clothes and general appearance bore the unmistakable imprint of the lawyer's clerk.

"My dear Lord Newberry!" the solicitor exclaimed. "I beg your pardon — Mr. David Newberry, since you wish it — let me offer you a hearty welcome back into — shall we call it civilisation?"

"Very good of you, I'm sure," David murmured, affecting not to notice the outstretched hand.

"I come, hoping sincerely that you are prepared to let bygones be bygones," his visitor continued. "Believe me, there were times when I felt a positive pain in carrying out the instructions we received from your lamented father."

The young man inclined his head.

"Who is this person with you?" he asked.

"I took the liberty of bringing my confidential clerk," Mr. Atkinson explained. "There are so many details connected with the estate which you should know of, things which no one man could carry in his head. We have all the papers here. It may be rather a long affair, but it has to be done."

"It must stand over until another time," David announced. "For this morning, I shall ask you to send away your clerk — what did you say his name was?"

"Mr. Moody. He has been with the firm for a very long time."

"Mr. Moody then," David continued, turning towards him, and for the first time there was a shade of courtesy in his tone and a slight smile upon his lips — "I shall ask you to send him away for the present. Anything that is necessary can be attended to later on. I am sorry, Mr. Moody, you have had the trouble of coming for no purpose."

The elderly man smiled from his place in the background.

"It's been a pleasure to see you again — er — Mr. David Newberry, if only for this moment."

The clerk, in obedience to a gesture from his employer, withdrew, and David motioned the latter to a chair. The lawyer's right hand was still twitching, but David's eyes were still blind.

"I shall open our conversation, my — Mr. Newberry," the man of law began, "by begging you to forget everything there may have been in the past of an unpleasant nature. I can assure you that your misfortune was a bitter grief to the firm, as it naturally was to your father and brothers."

"We can take all that for granted," David interrupted, a little curtly.

"Nevertheless," the other continued, "I must repeat my conviction that if your father, if we had any of us, realised the situation properly, everything would have been different. When you have an hour to spare, I should like to go into the whole series of incidents, one by one."

David smiled bitterly.

"I fear, Mr. Atkinson," he said, "that I shall never have that hour to spare."

"It has always been my conviction," the lawyer persisted, "that your father took an unduly censorious view of your earlier indiscretions."

David shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"A little late for that sort of thing, isn't it?" he remarked. "We will leave the past alone, so far as possible. There are certain things, however, which you must understand. I arrived home from Australia penniless, and as I couldn't see why in God's name my father couldn't do something for me, I wrote and asked him. His reply came through you, and you know what it was."

The lawyer fidgeted in his seat.

"I risked a good deal," he declared earnestly, "in attempting to modify your father's attitude."

"Never mind about that. You had to carry out instructions, of course — but here comes the point. I was in London, penniless, barely twelve months ago. I hadn't a job. I'd held a commission in the Australian army, which stopped my enlisting here. I thought of the Foreign Legion, but I hadn't the money to get to France. I wasn't eligible for the dole, even if I could have brought myself to touch it. You know what I did. I joined a gang of criminals. The first time I went out with them, they let me down. You also know the sequel to that."

"Is it worth while," Mr. Atkinson pleaded, "dwelling upon these — er — disagreeable incidents? The whole thing is finished and done with, you have come into a fine inheritance, an income of something like thirty thousand a year, and, if you will forgive my saying so, there is nothing left now but to wipe out this last very unpleasant memory, and make a fresh start."

"Eventually, perhaps," David observed. "As I have al-

ready warned you, however, I am not quite ready yet to take up my new responsibilities."

Mr. Atkinson was puzzled.

"But, my dear Mr. Newberry," he expostulated, "I don't quite see — I don't quite understand why there should be any delay."

"You wouldn't," was the brief retort, "but there is going to be, all the same."

"Perhaps you will explain."

"I sent for you to do so. I sha'n't use many words about it either. Mr. Atkinson, I am an embittered person."

All the sympathy which the lawyer could summon into his somewhat expressionless face was there, as he looked towards the slim young man with the clean-cut features and the hard grey-blue eyes, lounging in the opposite chair.

"I'm not surprised at that, Mr. Newberry."

"For fifteen years," David went on, "my father, my two brothers, and practically the whole of the family have treated me like an outcast, entirely without reason. My father and brothers are tragically dead, so that's an end of it. I can bear them no grudge, even if I can't altogether forgive."

The lawyer was grave and almost dignified.

"Indeed, Mr. Newberry," he said, "the continuation of any ill feeling on your part would be — if you will forgive my saying so — unbecoming. The whole country was shocked at the terrible accident which cost your two brothers their lives on their way back from Paris. Full details will never be known, as there were no other passengers, and both the pilot and the mechanic were killed, but it was clear that they fell from over two thousand feet on a perfectly still day on to the rocks, with, naturally, the most appalling results. No wonder when the news was

broken to your father the shock was too much for him. As you know, he fainted, never regained consciousness, and died without uttering a word. Mr. Newberry, you must forget all the wrongs you suffered from your family. Death, and such death, is atonement enough."

"You are perfectly right, Mr. Atkinson," David admitted. "I can assure you I have not an unkind thought in my mind toward my father or either of my brothers. That may be considered as wiped out. But to go back again to my own precarious existence. After suffering all that I had suffered, just reflect upon what happened to me when I was driven to join this band of criminals. Again I am made the cat's-paw. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Atkinson, that law-breaking as a profession is not in my line. I had decided to quit it before that first job. Then see what happened. There were three of us concerned in the affair. It was well enough planned, and there was plenty of time for all of us to have escaped. My two companions, however, got the funk, locked the door on me, got away themselves, and left me to face the music."

"Disgraceful!" the lawyer exclaimed.

"So disgraceful," David agreed, "that before I enter into my inheritance and my new life, I am going to break up that gang, whatever it costs me."

"But my dear — Mr. Newberry," the lawyer protested, "why on earth, in view of your wonderful future, should you run the slightest risk in dealing personally with this band of criminals? I ask you to consider the matter seriously. Is it worth while?"

"It is not only worth while, from my point of view," David confided, "but it has become a necessity."

"I fail to follow you," the lawyer confessed.

"If I don't go for them, they're coming for me. It seems that they don't allow seceders, and they have already

ordered me back to my place. As soon as they find out that I am a rich man and am not coming, there will be trouble."

Mr. Atkinson was honestly shocked.

"But, my dear Mr. Newberry," he expostulated, "let me entreat you to accompany me at once to Scotland Yard. Adequate protection shall be afforded to you. To that I pledge my word."

"You think so," David observed, with a faint smile. "I'm afraid you don't know my friends."

"Why not take Scotland Yard into your confidence concerning them," Mr. Atkinson urged. "I have always understood that the band of criminals with whom you were temporarily associated was one of the most dangerous in London. The police would move for you against them with the utmost pleasure. You ought to be able to give them valuable information and place yourself in safety at the same time."

David shook his head.

"I'm afraid that you are very much a layman in such matters, Mr. Atkinson," he regretted. "There's just one thing the venomous person who was my late Chief is proud of, and that is that no man has ever squealed and lived for twenty-four hours."

"Squealed?" the lawyer murmured questioningly.

"Given the show away — turned king's evidence," David expounded. "I'm not afraid of threats, but I took the oath like the others, and I really don't think that I could bring myself to break it. I swore that, whilst I lived, I would never give away to the police or any one else the various lurking places of the gang, the names of any of them, or the headquarters of their leader. I believe, from what I have been told, that in the last six years seven people have taken the initial step towards breaking their word, and not one of them lived for twenty-four hours."

Mr. Atkinson mopped his forehead. He was genuinely distressed.

"You must forgive me — you must really forgive me, Mr. Newberry," he begged, "if I venture to say that your point of view is outrageous."

"In what way?" David queried.

"How can your word of honour be binding to a band of criminals who, on their part, have already taken advantage of you, and from whom you acknowledge yourself to be still in danger?" the lawyer demanded.

David stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"The treachery to me," he pointed out, "was not on the part of the gang but on the part of two members of it only. Those I am proposing to deal with privately. So far as regards the rest, they have carried out what they imagined to be their part of the bargain. They sent a taxi-cab to meet me at the prison this morning, with a bottle of whisky to promote good feeling. They had a feast prepared for me, and my share of the result of the burglary has been carefully put on one side and is waiting for me. They've carried the affair through soundly, from their outlook."

Mr. Atkinson was very nearly angry. He spoke with resolution and vigour.

"The sooner you abandon these quixotic ideas the better, Mr. Newberry," he said. "You can't treat thieves like honest men. The Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard is a friend of mine. I propose that we visit him at once, or, better still, let me ring him up and invite him to lunch."

"Nothing doing," was the terse reply. "You have some vague idea, Mr. Atkinson, of what my life has been, but let me tell you this: I have never lived without adventure, even though it has cost me dear, and I have never broken my word to man, woman, child, or thief, although that has

cost me dear sometimes, too. I am taking this little job on outside the police; that is why I wanted to see you at once."

The lawyer was nonplussed. Perhaps he recognised impregnability; at any rate, he acknowledged temporary defeat.

"The time will probably come before long," his distinguished client concluded, "when I may be prepared to assume my title, to occupy my houses, and to visit my estate. Until then, I require you to keep my whereabouts an absolute secret both from my relatives and all enquirers, whoever they may be. I will sign a power of attorney, if necessary, and you will continue to manage my affairs as before."

Mr. Atkinson was touched and eager. The hard, legal tone of some of the letters in which he had conveyed messages from the late Earl of Newberry to his prodigal son had caused him many a groan in the light of subsequent events. He leaned a little forward, moistening his lips and endeavouring to keep his voice steady.

"Do I understand you, my lord — I beg your pardon, Mr. Newberry — correctly?" he asked. "It is your wish that we continue to administer your affairs and act as your agents for the present?"

"That is my wish," David assented. "In the meantime, I am in need of money. There will be no difficulty about that, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest. We are really almost ashamed to disclose the fact that the balances at your various banks amount to nearly a hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds. This, too, after we have invested quite freely of late."

"At which bank have I the largest balance?"

"You have sixty-nine thousand pounds at Barclays'. I

have here all the cheque books. Barclays' is the top one. It will be necessary — I regret very much to trouble you — but it will be necessary for you to accompany me there to demonstrate your signature."

"I will do that at once," David decided, rising to his feet. "My campaign will probably cost money."

The two men left the room together — the lawyer with an unexpectedly light heart. His client's mad scheme was depressing, but he had looked for worse things.

## CHAPTER III

In some odd and varying manner, every person in the hideous corner room on the first floor of the Lion and the Lamb public house seemed to possess something in common with its appalling ugliness. Tottie Green, renowned in criminal circles from Limehouse to Seven Dials, a mountainous heap of flesh, sat in his specially constructed easy-chair, upholstered in crimson velvet plush, coatless, his unbuttoned waistcoat freely sprinkled with tobacco ash, beads of perspiration from the heat of the room he loved standing out upon his coarse, low forehead. Cannon Ball Lem, in a suit of checks of music-hall size, the front of his hair plastered in two little curls over his forehead, and wearing bright yellow boots, represented the old-fashioned race of prize fighters as completely as the room itself had passed out of date with the ornate public houses of the last decade. The girl stretched upon the sofa, also upholstered with crimson plush, at first sight seemed to possess only the attractions of the barmaid type. She was large, richly but unbecomingly dressed, with flowing limbs, masses of golden hair, hazel eyes, a large pouting mouth, and over-beringed hands. The room itself was Tottie Green's headquarters and abode. It represented to him everything he had desired in life. The furniture was all of one pattern and had been proudly chosen in the Tottenham Court Road by the proprietor of the Lion and Lamb when he had furnished his corner public house in the purlieus of Bermondsey. There were two scratched mirrors with gilded frames upon the walls, whose only other

adornments were advertisements of whisky and other alcoholic beverages. The carpet was thick and might once have been expensive, but it was stained in many places, and much of the cigar ash which had escaped Tottie Green's waistcoat seemed to have found an eternal resting place in its pile. There were a few cheap vases upon the mantelpiece, decanters and an open box of cigars upon the table, an empty bottle of wine lying on its side, a floating cloud of cigar smoke, and many indications that the heavily curtained window had remained closed if not for weeks, at least for days.

"I guess our young gent ain't coming," Cannon Ball Lem observed, without removing the cigar from the corner of his mouth. "Think I'll drop down and have a game of billiards with Harry."

"You stay where you are," his patron and Chief growled. "He'll come fast enough. They generally do when Tottie Green sends for them."

The girl raised herself a little on the sofa and removed the cigarette from her lips. There was something lioness-like in the grace of her attitude, as she leaned with her elbow on the back of the couch, her cheek in the palm of her hand.

"What's all this talk about?" she demanded. "Why don't he come for his money?"

"He don't seem to need it," her guardian confided. "He ain't touched a bob from us, and there he is driving about in a fine motor car and staying at a West End hotel."

She laughed.

"If he's got any money to spare, I shall have to look after him," she remarked.

"I doubt whether you'd get him if you tried," Cannon Ball Lem snarled. "You should have heard him talk to us up at Wandsworth. He's got some of them fine gentleman

manners with him I can't abear. I'd like him in the ring for five minutes. I'd spoil his beauty."

"Don't do anything of that sort until I've made up my mind whether he's worth while," the girl yawned. "If I want to get him, I shall, so you needn't fret about that, Lem, or any of you. What's doing these days? I want some more jewellery."

"We've three of the lads out Hampstead way to-night," Tottie Green told her. "Might be a fat little job, but small. There's another affair I've marked down for some time, but our lads are getting too well known. That's one reason why I want to keep Dave."

"If you wanted to keep him, what did you start with selling him for?" she asked lazily.

"The lads did that," her guardian replied, puffing asthmatically. "Reuben was in the show, and if they'd nabbed him it might have meant the swinging room."

The girl rose to her feet and lounged over to the looking-glass. Her hands toyed ineffectually with the great coils of fair hair, which in their abundance and vitality seemed never to have known the restraining hand of a coiffeur. She turned around and looked about her disdainfully.

"Daddy Green," she complained, "this is the foulest room in London. I think that I shall leave you all and start on my own."

"What's the matter with the room?" her guardian demanded in bewilderment. "It's just the sort of place I always meant to have, all my days — the kind of headquarters to sit in and do nothing but make plans. Don't you go and spoil it all, Belle. Where would you go to if you left here, I wonder?"

"Up the West End," the girl replied thoughtfully. "I should like to go on the films. Think I shall, too."

Tottie Green began to shake. His enormous stomach heaved and quivered. He perspired more freely than ever. Yet, notwithstanding his general appearance of impotence, there was a terribly menacing look about his eyes and lips.

"If you did that, my girl," he threatened, "you'd be sorry for it."

"My God, the boys were right!" Cannon Ball Lem, who had been looking out of the window, declared. "Here he is, in a motor car, with a chauffeur in livery, getting out as bold as brass. Isn't he the toff too! I ain't sure that I want him back, guv'nor," he added, turning to his Chief. "I fancy him and me'd fall out."

"You'd probably get what you're asking for if you did," the girl mocked. "You've gone a bit to seed, you know, Lem."

There was a knock at the door. David Newberry entered, closing it behind him. For a moment, he stood still. The girl was watching him, her hand resting lightly upon her hip, her hair aflame against the common, incandescent light. She smiled a welcome to him.

"Well, Mr. Bad Penny," she said, "come to see the old folks at home, eh?"

He acknowledged her greeting courteously but without enthusiasm, and, advancing farther into the room, laid his hat and stick upon the table and drew off his gloves. He nodded curtly to Tottie Green and ignored Cannon Ball Lem altogether. They watched him, a little stupefied. He had had time to visit his tailor, and he was wearing clothes of a cut and style outside the range of their experience. He was a great deal more assured in his manner, too, than any one should have been in the presence of the great Chief of the Underworld. The old man carried a book in which seven crosses appeared at different times

after the names of seven young men. Two of Tottie Green's Lambs were languishing in prison, but the seven young men had passed into oblivion, all right. Pa Green ruled his band through fear, and the composure of this young visitor in his presence was distressing. He scowled across at him.

"So you've come at last," he remarked harshly. "Taken your time about it, haven't you?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, my first intention was not to come at all," David replied. "Then I decided it would be rather interesting to know what you wanted from me. Besides," he added, after a moment's pause, "I have something to say to you on my own account."

Tottie Green drew one or two deep breaths. The sound itself was unpleasant, and the display of his teeth was worse. He drank from a tumbler by his side and lit a cigar. For some reason or other, it seemed to occur to him that amicable methods might be better with his visitor.

"Do you want a drink or smoke, young man?" he asked, pointing to the table on which was set out a liberal supply of decanters and cigar boxes.

"Not with you," was the calm reply.

The autocrat of the Lambs stared across the room. His eyes for the moment were bulbous. He had the air of one who could scarcely believe what he heard. From behind, Belle laughed lightly.

"That's right, Mr. Dandy," she encouraged him. "Don't let them bully you."

Cannon Ball Lem clenched his fist and looked at it thoughtfully. The man in the chair had more than ever the appearance of a fat and bloated satyr. Nevertheless, though he was shaking with anger, he still took pains to restrain himself.

"Young fellow," he confided, "there's more than one

has gone to his grave for holding out against me. I don't allow insubordination. You joined my Lambs, and when you join you're mine until I give you your quittance, or until you buy it from me."

"Give it to me then," David demanded. "I've had enough of your Lambs."

"I don't choose to give it to you," was the angry reply. "Be sensible, Dave lad. I need you for my work. You ain't so well known as some of the others, and you can do the gentleman stunts. That's what we're short of. You can work with Belle there sometimes, if you don't want the rough stuff, although they tell me you're a scrapper, all right."

"That's more than your lads are," David answered bitterly. "They left me alone to fight two policemen whilst they got away with the swag. If that's their idea of running a job, it isn't mine. I've finished. Do you understand that? I wouldn't go out with your pack of cowards again for anything in the world."

The old man was breathing heavily. Speech at that moment would have been unwise. Belle called across the room to this very bold visitor.

"What about me, Dave? Wouldn't you take me along and let me show you a few stunts? There are more ways of making money than breaking into safes."

"Thank you," David answered, "I don't want to hear of any of your stunts. I've finished with the lot of you. That is one of the two things I came here to say."

"And what might be the other?" Lem asked, sidling up a little closer to where David was lounging against the table.

"Get out of my way," the latter enjoined. "I'm going to say it to the old man there, and I want to say it face to face. You've had a pretty good innings, Tottie Green.

You've sat in here, filling your stomach, and swilling, and getting hold of young men to do your dirty work a trifle too long. It's time it came to an end. You played a foul trick on me, and I'm going to get it back on you. I'm going to break you and your gang. As to those two cowards who ran away and left me to face the music down at Frankley Grange, they're going to be sorry they were ever born before I've finished with them."

There was a brief and strange silence. Cannon Ball Lem, who was a slow thinker, stood for a moment with his mouth open, and an ugly light dawning gradually in his eyes. The old man was making wicked and stertorous noises in his place. The girl was leaning a little forward, mildly amused, but watching every one closely through half-veiled eyes.

"You've got it straight from me now," David went on coldly. "I came here to give you warning. I'm just being honest about the matter. Open war. That's what it's going to be. I'm a Lamb in revolt."

"Hold on a minute, Lem," his Chief croaked. "Wait till I give the word."

David, who, warned by certain twitchings of the other's body, was standing tense and prepared, shrugged his shoulders.

"You can turn your bully loose on me if you want to," he said, "but I don't see the use. My chauffeur down below knows I've come here, and he won't go away without me. There was a policeman at the door as I came in. I should think a row up here in the Holy of Holies wouldn't do you any good."

Cannon Ball Lem was eyeing his master wistfully.

"Five minutes, Dad," he begged. "Let me have five minutes with him."

"Can you fight, David Newberry?" the girl drawled.

"I shouldn't have come to a place like this without be-

ing able to take care of myself," was the evasive answer.

There was regret in her eyes as she lounged across the floor, moving as though without definite intent between the two men. With the flutter of her skirts, there stole out into the tobacco and drink-odorous room a waft of peculiar but seductive perfume, overstrong, almost nauseating, yet in its way disturbing. The memory of it lingered with David long after he had left the sordid apartment.

"I should have loved a scrap," she confessed, "but you're right, David. The police are better away from this place. Chuck it, Lem," she enjoined in a voice of authority. "A scrap between you two wouldn't do any one any good. As for you, David," she concluded, with a challenging look into his set, determined face, "you're a brave man in your own way, I suppose, but you're a fool, all the same, to come here and talk like this. You'll get what you're asking for, all right, if you don't take care. They'll have you one of these dark nights."

David Newberry prepared to take his leave.

"Let them, if they can," he rejoined. "I've learned a few of their tricks myself, you know."

"Your hundred and seventy-five pounds is here," Tottie Green growled.

"Keep it," was the scornful reply. "It will do to pay the hospital bill of some of your Lambs when I begin to talk to them."

In some unexplained manner, each one of them knew that the immediate danger of a fracas was over. Belle, with her hand upon her hip, crossed over to the plush-draped mantelpiece. She took a cigarette from a box and lit it.

"Can't I have it for chocolates?" she asked. "It's not enough for diamonds, or I should have liked a ring. Goodbye, David Newberry."

She flung a mocking smile across the room, and, with an

ironic bow, he took his leave. As they listened to his retreating footsteps, she laughed again.

"He won't be much trouble," she declared scornfully. "If you really want him, I can get him all right."

## CHAPTER IV

Cannon Ball Lem stood at the window and scowled down into the street. The girl, with a cigarette between her lips, joined him. They watched David's unhurried departure.

"A chauffeur — in livery!" the former exclaimed, turning aside to spit into his Chief's spittoon.

"Don't do that," the girl ordered, in a tone of repugnance. "Makes me sick."

Lem growled.

"Swanking about in his own motor car and wearing toff's clothes!"

"If you ask me," the girl observed, "I think that he *is* a toff. He behaves as though he had been used to that sort of thing all his life."

"Where did Ned Rattigan bring in word that he was staying?" Tottie Green demanded.

"One of these swanky hotels," Lem replied — "the Milan Court, up west. What I should like to know, Guv'nor," he went on earnestly, "is where did he get the money from? He hadn't got the price of a pint of beer when he joined up."

"Maybe he's on a confidence lay," Tottie Green suggested.

The girl shook her head.

"David isn't clever enough for that," she declared. "It would need some nerve too, just out of prison. You can take my word for it, I'm right. Joined us because he was a toff down on his luck. Why, you can tell from the way

he talks and wears his clothes. If any of you buy a new suit, even Reuben, you look like gawks for the first few days."

"Gentleman David, eh?" Tottie Green murmured. "Maybe you're right, girl. What I should like to know is, where does the money come from? It seems to me that some of it ought to belong to us."

"You should have left him to me to deal with," the girl remarked, throwing herself upon the couch. "Some of it probably would have done then. The last person who ought to have been here is Lem. That made him mad to start with. . . . Who's this?"

They listened to the flying footsteps mounting the stairs, and wondered. They heard them without anxiety, for, in what was coming, there was nothing akin to the slow, ponderous footfall of authority.

"Some one in a hurry," the girl drawled.

The door was swiftly but silently opened and closed. The young man Reuben entered. He stood on the threshold for a minute, sobbing for lack of breath, glancing eagerly around. Then he closed the door behind him and came farther into the room — a lean, cadaverous-looking young man, with smoothly brushed, glossy black hair, sombrely but carefully dressed.

"Has he been?" he demanded, almost fiercely.

"Has who been?" Tottie Green enquired.

"Dave — blast him!"

"Yes, he's been," the other acknowledged, his watery, bulbous eyes fixed curiously upon the newcomer, searching his expression as though seeking to read his thoughts.

"Dave's been. What about it, Reuben? What's wrong?"

The young man sank into a chair. He was coughing a little now, and there were drops of sweat breaking through the unhealthy pallor of his forehead.

"Togged out like a duke," Lem grumbled. "Came in a motor car, if you please, with a chauffeur in livery. Turned up his nose at his hundred and seventy-five pounds. Wants to give us the go-by. I reckon the boss will see to that."

A spasm of anger enabled the visitor to recover himself.

"Togged out like a duke, eh?" he repeated. "Wouldn't have his share of the Frankley cash. Not likely! He's done better than that."

"Come into money or something?" the girl enquired lazily.

"Come into fiddlesticks," was the fierce reply. "Gawd, if I'd got here half an hour earlier! He's done us — that's what's happened — he's done us in the eye. Done you, Daddy Green! Done me! Done Lem here! Came like a duke, eh? Motor car, clothes, and all! Well, you'll never see him again."

There was a hushed atmosphere in the tawdry, smoke-hung room. Reuben's disjointed sentences were pregnant with some vital emotion, which became instantly communicated to his auditors. Even the girl leaned forward. No one spoke. They could sense the words framing on his lips.

"I'll tell you. He's got the Frankley Blue Diamond, the Virgin's Tear."

No one spoke. Tottie Green's huge stomach began to rise and fall. The colour mounted to his forehead. He looked like a man whose blood pressure needed serious attention. Cannon Ball Lem stood with his mouth open crookedly, unbelieving, his senses resisting those few, commonplace words. The girl swung herself off the couch and sat leaning forward, her chin upon her two clenched hands, a glorious, but terrible light in her eyes. It was she who spoke.

"You're mad, Reuben," she declared.

He wiped his forehead. With the mingled agony and evil joy of his disclosure, he had become the coolest of the quartette.

"Am I mad?" he rejoined. "I have been, ever since that night, not to have suspected. You were mad too, Lem, to bustle me off and leave him behind. We got him fixed wrong that way, and he took his chance."

"Speak plain, you fool," Lem demanded.

"What do you mean by saying he's got the Virgin's Tear?" Belle insisted.

"It's perfectly plain," Reuben continued. "That old lady in the bedroom was cunning, but not cunning enough for Gentleman Dave. She gave us the keys of the safe because she was tied up and had to, but the Virgin's Tear was never there. That's why he stayed behind and got left. He'd tumbled to it. We were the mugs. The Virgin's Tear was where it always had been kept — in a small casket, at the back of the dressing table. He'd tumbled to it somehow. That's why he fought so hard. That's why he was so far behind us."

Tottie Green was still speechless. His cunning brain was at work. He was thinking, and thinking very hard. The natural savagery of the girl was shining out of her face. She, too, was trying to piece together the story, and her first impulse was to reject it.

"You're talking like the villain of a dime novelette, Reuben," she sneered. "How can you tell what took place in the room after the girl came down? How do you know he found the diamond, much more had nerve enough to pinch it? And supposing he did, supposing he was cleverer than you two blundering fools, what did he do with it? He was caught within twenty yards of the room. Do you suppose he swallowed it?"

Reuben was himself again now, and the Reuben of every-day life was a very self-composed, cynical and precise young person.

"During that twenty or thirty yards," he pointed out, "there may have presented itself through the window, or in the corridor or room through which he passed, a possible hiding place."

"Quit this and get on to facts," Tottie Green growled. "You must have more reasons than this. Tell us why you're sure he's got the Blue Diamond. Let's have the facts, lad."

"You shall have them, all right," was the quick reply. "I'll tell you why it's a cert. For one thing, Moss and Nathan, the fake jewellers, have an order in hand at the present moment from Lady Frankley to make up for her an imitation of the Virgin's Tear, and they had to work on specifications. She hadn't the stone even to show them."

"No proof," Tottie Green grunted. "Go on."

"Very well, then, listen to this," Reuben continued. "Last week, the Insurance Company settled up with her ladyship. They paid her ninety-two thousand pounds, and fifty thousand pounds of that was for the Virgin's Tear."

"You're talking through your hat, Reuben," Lem declared.

"I am not talking through my hat, as you'll realise if you'll allow me to finish. The jewels were insured with the Mutual, and the young woman who typed out the final agreement and typed the body of the cheque was Mollie Padmore."

Tottie Green wiped the sweat from his forehead and groaned.

"Jesus!" he muttered.

"The Virgin's Tear," Reuben went on, his voice becoming lower, his eyes shining like black points of light, "was amongst the stolen jewels that night, and the Insur-

ance Company have paid for it. Did Lem here get it, or even see it? No. Did I? No. It's your Gentleman David who did us in. He hid it, or threw it out of the window, somewhere between her ladyship's room and the door which we had to lock, where he was trapped. He got word somehow to a pal, and he's touched. Rolled up in his motor car, did he? Dressed like a duke! Got a grudge against us for leaving him, eh? That's a cunning piece of bluff. He stayed behind to get the Virgin's Tear, and damned well worth while it was too."

"Been threatening us," Lem put in. "He's been down here, threatening us. Called us cowards, because we left him behind. Says he's breaking away from us. Blast him!"

"Breaking away from us, eh?" Reuben repeated. "I should think the boss might have something to say about that."

"Oh, Christ!" Lem muttered to himself in agony. "If they'd only let me give him what he deserved, he'd have been lying here now, and us waiting for him to come to, to give him some more."

There was another silence — an ominous, menacing silence. The roar of traffic in the streets below found its way in broken patches through the fast-closed windows, but in the room itself one heard nothing but the heavy breathing of the grotesque and evil figure upon the chair. He it was who first moved. He turned wheezily to one side, took up a block of memorandum paper, searched for and found with difficulty the stubby end of a pencil in his capacious waistcoat pocket. With painful effort he wrote. They all watched him. They knew what it meant when Daddy Green wrote with that particular pencil on that particular block of paper.

## CHAPTER V

David Newberry, a few days later, came face to face with an old friend in Bond Street. He endeavoured to pass on with wilfully unseeing eyes, but the Marquis would have none of it; a large man, he blocked the pathway and made escape impossible.

"David Newberry, by all that's amazing!" he exclaimed. "So you're about again, young fellow."

"Yes, sir, I'm out," was the toneless reply. "I passed through the little postern gate a few days ago."

The Marquis refused to wince.

"And glad of it, eh?"

"Well, I like fresh air," David admitted. "There are certain restrictions, too, about prison life, which never appealed to me."

"Don't write your reminiscences," the Marquis begged. "We're fed up with them, Newberry. What are you going to do about things now? The world has changed for you during the last seven or eight months."

"Yes, it has changed," the other admitted. "I have a title which I don't want and a position which is useless to me. I may be able to do something with the money."

"Embittered," his companion murmured. "I thought so. Don't know that I blame you altogether, but you'll have to be reasonable. You've more friends than you know of. Every one thought that your father was terribly hard, and, although one doesn't want to speak ill of the dead, there weren't two young men in the country more unpopular than your two brothers. You've been a bad boy, of

course, but I don't mind telling you that there isn't one of us in the county wouldn't sooner have you at Anderleyton than either of them. Poor chaps, they were asking for it and they got it in the neck, and that's all there is to be said about it. Now, what are your plans?"

"I haven't any," David told him, "beyond the immediate present."

"Not thinking of settling abroad, or any rubbish of that sort? Martha seemed to have got hold of that idea, somehow."

"I might," David admitted. "I should have liked Kenya in the old days, if I'd had a little capital."

The Marquis thrust his hand through the young man's arm.

"At six o'clock in the evening," he confided, "I owe it to my constitution to take a drink. You'll say stupid things if I ask you to come to the Club. We'll try the Ritz Grill Room."

They went on their way together — the Marquis of Glendower, Lord Lieutenant of the county in which David had been born, a portly, dignified man, broad-shouldered, yet with a certain sparseness of frame which spoke of athletic pursuits, and David, fretting a little, but very helpless against the friendliness of the older man. Over a whisky and soda in a retired corner, the latter abandoned all restraint.

"What did you do it for, David?" he demanded.

"I joined the gang partly out of devilishment, and partly because I was starving," the other confessed. "I literally hadn't a shilling."

"But surely," Glendower persisted, "your father couldn't have refused you a reasonable income, however small it was."

"I wrote and told him precisely the straits I was in,"

David confided. "He answered me through his lawyers. I'll show you the letter some day, if you like — rather an epic in its way. He declined to assist me with even a five-pound note."

"One doesn't wish to speak ill of the dead," the Marquis repeated, "but I always thought Henry was the hardest-hearted, coldest-blooded, most obstinate old curmudgeon in our part of the world."

"Up till then," David went on, "I had never committed a dishonest deed. I joined up with these fellows primarily to get a meal, and they sent me out during the first week. I hadn't much to do with the actual robbery at Frankley, except, of course, that I was there to help. I did the fighting, and played the fool generally. My companions sold me like a couple of dirty scoundrels; they got away with the jewellery, and I recovered consciousness in hospital."

"You knocked those two policemen up a bit, though."

"They weren't badly hurt. I sent each of them a cheque yesterday."

"A dirty gang you seemed to have got mixed up with, even for criminals," the Marquis mused.

David lit a cigarette.

"Yes, they're a bad lot," he admitted. "They won't last much longer, though."

"You know," his companion went on, "the troubles of your home life were absolutely flagrant. There isn't a soul who doesn't realise that you were very badly treated. I don't wish to hurry things, of course, David, but we want you back again, and I'm jolly certain that you'll be surprised at the welcome you get. People soon forget, and there are a good many of us have knocked a policeman or two about, some time or other during our lives, and ought to have gone to jail for it. In a month or two's time, or a year, say, if you come and settle down with us, not a soul

will remember a thing about your little affair. I bet you could have the hounds if you wanted them before long."

"You're very kind, as you always were to me," David acknowledged gratefully.

"Well," the Marquis continued, "I'm very glad to have met you this evening, anyway. You were always a harum-scarum sort of lad, and difficult to deal with, and I sort of feel that after this little escapade, unless some one talks to you seriously, you might be dropping out of sight again, and we don't want you to. Have you been to see your sister?"

"Not I."

"I don't know that I blame you. All the same, you can afford to forgive a good deal when you remember that she's lost her father and two brothers within six months."

"I fancy I should be the last person she'd want to see," David objected.

"Give her the chance of saying so, then. Jolly nice girl, Harold's stepdaughter's turned out to be. She'll be one of the beauties next season. By-the-by, would you like me to trot you round to see them all? It wouldn't be a bad idea, and I should rather enjoy it."

"Not just at present," was the prompt refusal. "It's awfully good of you, sir, and I appreciate it immensely, but I am going to ask you to keep quiet, if you don't mind, even about having met me, for a month or two. I want to lie *perdu* if I can."

"Up to more mischief?" the older man asked gravely.

David shrugged his shoulders.

"You might think so, sir," he admitted, "but, at any rate I'm not out to defy the law or anything of that sort."

The Marquis rose to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I've got to go upstairs to sign some fellow's visitor's book. London seems packed with foreign

royalties just now. You'll leave me your address, David. Come, I insist upon that."

"I'm at the Milan Court, sir," David confided, "but keep away from me for a time, please. I'm staying there as Mr. David Newberry, and I want to remain as quiet as I can for a week or so. I'll look you up directly I'm through with my little business."

"That's a promise?" the Marquis stipulated.

"Word of honour."

David turned back into Bond Street, curiously and illogically disturbed. His was one of those dispositions warped by a long course of injustice which become almost apt to resent kindness. It was like an unwanted sop, an irritating balm, for wounds which he preferred to keep open. Many more interviews like this one with the Marquis, he realised, might altogether change his settled poise towards life. He had been ill-used, and the bitterness of it was fast becoming part of himself. He was being cheated of self-pity, he reflected, with a grim little smile forced upon his lips by a latent sense of humour. In his disturbed mental attitude, he saw his way less clearly, as he passed through the crowded streets. His eyes had lost their hard, steely gleam. He was perplexed by a momentary weakness, which he discarded almost with reluctance.

At the corner of Bruton Street, he picked up a taxicab and drove eastwards. With some difficulty he found the place of which he was in search — a large building, which had once been a warehouse, at the end of a paved alley off a side street in Holborn. A black sign was painted over the entrance:

ABBS'S GYMNASIUM

BOXING. COURSES IN PHYSICAL CULTURE. FENCING.

(*Terms moderate*)

(*Enquire within*)

David pushed open the swing door, and stood for a few moments at the foot of some steps leading to the office in which two young women were typing, gazing down the long room. There was a certain amount of sparring going on in the various rings, and some vigorous work with the punch ball. A short, stout little man presently came hurrying up.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked cheerfully.

"Recognise me, first of all. Then I should like you to show me round."

The little man looked hard at his visitor. Suddenly a light broke into his face.

"My God, it's young Mr. David!" he exclaimed. "Glad I am to see you, sir — real glad!"

David held out his hand, which the other grasped. Suddenly a cloud darkened the gymnasium instructor's face. He coughed.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," he apologised. "I forgot for a moment. I thought you were back at Anderleyton."

"I want you to forget Anderleyton," David told him curtly. "I'm living for a short time, well — incognito — as much as I can. As a matter of fact," he went on, with a grim smile, "I've been living incognito for the last six months — a life of complete seclusion, Abbs. Hear anything about it?"

The little man coughed once more.

"I did hear as how there'd been a bit of trouble, sir," he admitted, "and very sorry I was too. And then to lose your father and brothers like that! Enough to turn any one's head."

"Let it go at that," David enjoined shortly. "I came here to talk business with you, Abbs. Who's that sandy-haired fellow there with the useful punch?"

"That's Sammy West," Abbs confided. "We're training him seriously. He's fighting at the Albert Hall next week. Then there's Teddy Levy a little lower down. He's having a rest with his sparring partner."

"Any jiu jitsu instructors?"

"Only one at present, but I'm in correspondence with another. I tell you, sir, we could turn out as plucky a band of fighters as you'd see anywhere — fellows who know how to use their hands and their legs, and get out of any scrap clean."

"Business good?"

Mr. Abbs scratched his head.

"It's good enough, so to speak, sir," he replied, "but, all the same, it's difficult to make it pay. We've plenty of clients just now — couldn't keep them out last night. A good many of them only comes in for half an hour's exercise. Better for them than the public house, but there ain't much profit about it."

"Show me round," David begged. "I should like to see your lads at work."

They completed a tour of the premises. Then David laid his hand upon his companion's arm.

"Take me to your office," he enjoined. "I have a proposal to make to you."

Mr. Abbs led the way up the steps to the untidy-looking apartment, where a couple of girls sat typing at old-fashioned and battered desks. There were announcements of boxing contests upon the walls, and torn bills dealing with several other sporting events. One of the girls paused, with her fingers upon the keys of her machine, and looked curiously at David. The other continued her work, unnoticing. The two men passed on beyond to a smaller sanctum, and Abbs closed the door behind them carefully.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he enquired, throwing some papers from a chair and dusting it carefully.

David lit a cigarette. His eyes seemed always to be wandering back to the long line of sparring youths dimly to be seen now through the glass casements.

"I heard of your establishment in an odd sort of way, a few months ago," he observed, "and when I was told it was run by a man named Abbs, I felt sure that it must be you. Seems a good many years since you were our gymnasium instructor down at Anderleyton."

"It does indeed," the little man agreed. "Your poor dad, he was one for looking after his health, he was. An hour's exercise in the morning, and an hour in the afternoon. And then your two brothers — that was fair tragic. You was the only one though, sir, as took to boxing proper. Neither of them could have stood up to you for thirty seconds."

"And didn't they love me for it!" David reflected, a little grimly. "Never mind. I didn't come here to talk about that. Listen to me carefully, Abbs. Why do you suppose you get so many of these young fellows anxious to learn boxing and jiu jitsu?"

Abbs looked at his visitor keenly. He had the air of a man not altogether at his ease. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other, and considered for a moment.

"Do you really want me to tell you that, sir?"

"It's what I came for."

"Well, then, this is how it seems to me, and naturally I've come across a few things that carry out the idea," Abbs began slowly. "There's a good many of them who come just for exercise and because they want to be able to hold their own in a tussle, but there's another lot that comes here what I'm not so sure about. Queer lads they are too, some of them."

"Tell me about them," David begged.

"You see, sir," Abbs continued, "there's a good deal of this quick, raiding robbery going on nowadays, and a young man who's clever with his fists, and knows how to use his feet and wrists, is the one who can get away with it. Mind you," he went on guardedly, "I'm not saying that you'd find many at my show like that, but I'm certain that it's at the backs of the minds of most of them."

"Gangsters," David murmured softly.

"Gangsters is the word. Why, where there used to be half a dozen bands in the country, and these pretty well confined to the race courses, to-day I should say there are fifty. The worst of them use guns or knives. I try to get into the brains of my lads here that that's where the serious trouble comes. I try to teach them to do all that is necessary in the way of defence or attack in as straightforward a manner as possible, if one might use the word."

"That's good," David approved. "Talking of gangs," he went on, "have you ever heard of the Lambs?"

Abbs shook his head doubtfully.

"Not by name, sir," he admitted. "I know there is one gang — very hot stuff too — with a leader who is supposed to live in seclusion and direct them from a distance. I don't know anything about them, though, sir, or any one else."

"It is my intention," David announced, tapping another cigarette upon the table and lighting it, "to put that particular band out of business. Do you think I could engage, and train, say, thirty of your lads, who would take the job on under your supervision and mine?"

Abbs was frankly startled.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he protested, "but surely that's a police job?"

"I'm not exactly hand in glove with the police," David explained drily. "There's money in my proposition, you know, Abbs. Quite enough to make it worth while."

The man was obviously uncomfortable.

"I'm doing very well with my little academy," he confided. "I'd rather not know what my pupils are training for. I'd rather not know what they do when they're outside these walls."

"It would be a thousand pounds down for you," David announced, with the air of a deaf man; "ten pounds a week for the lads, and fifty pounds for each one of the Lambs they tumble into jail or put out of action."

"It's real money, all right," Abbs acknowledged wistfully, "but by all accounts these gangsters are a wicked lot. There ain't one of them who don't carry a gun or a knife or something. My lads ain't used to that sort of stuff."

"No, but I want your lads trained so that they can deal with it," David explained. "With the help of jiu jitsu, there's very little in it between a man who's armed and a man who isn't at close quarters. I think I could prove that to you sometime, if we go into this little affair together. Besides, I can tell you another thing about the Lambs. They've been earning too much money. They're getting fat and lazy, some of them, and they haven't the stomach for a fight that they had in the old days."

"Was it them as played the dirty on you, my lord?" Abbs queried.

"It was," David acquiesced, "and whether you help me or not, there isn't one of them who isn't going to regret it. I can give you the cheque for the thousand now, Abbs."

"To-morrow morning, if you please, sir," the man begged. "Leave it over till then, and I'll see what can be done. I didn't want to be dragged into any business of this

sort, but after all, it's you, Mr. David, and the money's good."

David, as he turned to take his leave, was suddenly conscious of a queer sense of disturbance. He was back again for a moment in that hideous public-house sitting room, a flaring palace, with its beer-stained interior. The stink of the room was in his nostrils and, mingled with it, the same half-alluring, half-nauseating perfume, with its queer suggestions of the jungle, of secret and sickly places. He lifted his head quickly. There was a rustle in the outside office.

"Where on earth does that scent come from?" he asked.

Abbs looked over the top of the window.

"It's one of them damned typists," he muttered.

## CHAPTER VI

David awoke some time in the black hours of the following morning, in the chamber of his suite at the Milan Court, acutely conscious that he was not alone. He leaned out of his bed and turned on the switch of his electric lamp. Nothing happened. He tried again — without result. He reached upward for the bell and found only an empty cord. The severed plug lay upon his pillow. The curtains, which he remembered distinctly having left open to admit a current of air from the window, were closely drawn. He was dimly aware of at least two, there may have been three, dark, human shapes grouped a little way from his bed. He was not a nervous person but there was something terrifying in the silence by which he was surrounded.

"Who is in this room?" he asked sharply.

There was no immediate answer. He sat up and opened his mouth to shout. Suddenly an unseen hand thrust something between his teeth; others pinioned his arms. One of those dimly visible shapes bent over the bedstead rails, and his feet were held down. He struggled for a moment furiously. Then he realised that he was at a hopeless disadvantage, and he lay quite passive, using all his senses, struggling to discern the forms of his assailants, listening for any encouraging sounds from without. It was evidently the one hour of rest between night and dawn, for the rumble of traffic over Waterloo Bridge had ceased, and a pall of silence lay over the Strand and the nearer thoroughfares of the City. He tried to speak, but only choked. Then a

voice addressed him, unexpectedly near to his bedside — a familiar, silky, almost melodious voice, with a sneer underlying its smoothness.

"I am Reuben," the voice announced, "and these are two of Tottie Green's lads chosen for their muscle. We've brought you a message from Tottie Green — an official one this time — and from the Council of the Lambs, the Lambs who admitted you to membership less than twelve months ago. You know what we want."

David made no attempt at reply. Speech could only be a grotesque and incoherent thing.

"You know also who I am," the voice went on. "I am Reuben — Reuben Grossett. If I'd been at the Lion and the Lamb when you paid your visit there, you wouldn't have brought off that bluff. If I take the gag away, will you give us your word of honour not to call out whilst we talk. Nod your head if you agree."

David nodded. Anything to get that loathsome spring, bound with rubber, out of his mouth. The other deftly removed it.

"I take it you will keep your word," Reuben remarked, "but perhaps it would be as well to remind you that I am sitting within a foot of you, and that if you try to summon help, it will be the last time you open your mouth in this world. We don't merely threaten, either. You ought to know that. We keep our word."

"I shall not call out for help," David agreed, "unless some one actually comes to the door. Why should I? What harm have I to fear from you?"

"None, if you behave like a pal, and don't try any silly games," was the curt reply. "If you want to know what we've come for, I'll tell you. We've come for the Virgin's Tear, or the Blue Diamond, or whatever you care to call it — the jewel you pinched from Frankley Place."

"Then the sooner you go back again," David rejoined, "the less time you'll waste. I haven't got it."

There was a brief silence. David's eyes, accustomed a little now to the darkness, made out that there were four forms in the room and, though no voice was raised above a breath, he was conscious of that whisper of menace, a veritable wave of evil. He realised that no one believed him.

"So far as we have heard," Reuben went on slowly, "there was only one burglary at Frankley Place that night, and we were the boys who were concerned in it. There were no other thieves about, just you and I and Lem. You stayed longest in the room where the jewels were — too long for your own safety. You followed us out — "

"Yes, I followed you out," David interrupted fiercely, "and what happened? We could all have got away. You wanted to make sure of your own safety and you locked the door — locked it against me, as well as your pursuers. Dirty cowards, that's what you were. That's what I went back to tell Tottie Green."

Again there was that little breeze of menace — an undernote of movement, half of muttered whispering. A breath of wind shook the blind against the window.

"We are here to discuss one matter, and one matter only," Reuben said, "and you've a better chance of waking up in the morning if you'll remember it. The Virgin's Tear was stolen from Frankley Place that night, from the room in which we left you. No one else could have got in and taken it. What did you do with it? You disposed of it somewhere. How? In what hiding place?"

"Why are you so sure," David asked, "that the Virgin's Tear was stolen? It wasn't amongst the other jewels. Why should you think that I discovered it?"

"We know that it was stolen," was the half-whispered reply, "because it has just come to our notice that the

Insurance Company has paid for its loss. Insurance Companies don't pay without proof. You are the only man who could have taken it. You went into prison a pauper, and you come out spending money like a millionaire. Perhaps you can explain that."

"Perhaps you can explain what I did with the Virgin's Tear, then?" David countered, listening, with a faint gleam of hope, to the first market wagon rumbling over Waterloo Bridge. "It was three or four days before I recovered consciousness after the fight that night, and when I did, all my clothes had been taken away from me."

"You had plenty of chances of getting rid of it before the police rushed in," Reuben replied. "You had to pass through two rooms to get to the door by which we made our escape. There may have been hiding places in the room. On the other hand, two of the windows were open, and below you were the grounds. That's all in the way of explanations. We haven't any time to spare, Dave. We want the Virgin's Tear, or to know where you deposited it. Come through with it, Dave, or take what's coming to you."

"Do you mean to murder me?"

"We mean to get the Virgin's Tear."

"I haven't got it."

The lean, supple figure, bending over the side of David's bed, hung down in front of his eyes the illuminated dial of a watch.

"We can only give you one minute, Dave," he said shortly. "After that, you are going to pass out, or wish you could pass out, — three thirty-three. You have sixty seconds."

"If you murder me," David reminded him, "you'll do it for nothing. I haven't got the Virgin's Tear."

"You know where it is."

"I haven't the faintest idea."

The four shapes all seemed to lean toward him. There was the sound as though of an angry wind stirring amongst decayed leaves. They drew round the bed. He could feel the hot, beery breath of one of them upon his cheek. Reuben was handling a length of sinister-looking cord.

"Thirty seconds have gone," he announced.

Flat on his back, David Newberry waited for death. There seemed little to be done, poor chance of awakening any one, even if he broke his word and attempted to call out. Those long, skinny fingers, which he had always hated, were within a few inches of his mouth. Reuben was bracing his knee against the bedstead.

"Fifteen seconds, David. You're going out if you don't give us a line on the diamond."

Still no sound in the sleeping hotel. A late taxi hooted up the Strand. One or two more wagons were rolling across the bridge, but the electric standards were still alight, the dawn was still to come.

"Time," Reuben murmured.

"Time be damned!" David rejoined. "I haven't got the diamond, blast you!"

The gag was in his mouth. His wrists were held down by two of his assailants. A moment later, the cord was around his throat, drawn up tighter and tighter until it was taut. Then Reuben paused. One of the other stepped forward and handed something across the bed.

"You're in the swinging room, mate. Your last chance — going fast! Where's the Virgin's Tear?"

David made the effort of his life. The muscles of his legs and arms swelled almost to breaking point. He felt that his veins were bursting. His head seemed strangely congested. Not one thousandth part of an inch would those devilishly fastened cords give. A Houdini might have escaped

from his bonds; a Samson would have failed. He felt his breath go out in one last gasp, as his strength died away. The cord around his neck was cutting now. Everything in the room was dancing. He heard the drawing of a stopper from a bottle, smelt something less sickly but more powerful than chloroform, which seemed in a single breath to take all his senses away. Without even a struggle he fell back and lay prostrate and inert upon the bed.

The sunlight streaming into the room awakened him. He lay still for some time, trying to reconstruct what had happened, to sort out fancy from fact. Then, still sore, he sat slowly up in bed. There was scarcely a sign of disorder in the room, and little change in it, save that the cut telephone wire lay upon the carpet, and the bell knob still reposed upon the counterpane. He sprang out of bed and gazed at his neck in the looking-glass. There was a faint red mark there, but it was barely distinguishable. And then a strange fancy came upon him. He stood quite still, his head thrown back as though he were listening. It was no fancy, after all. It was unmistakable in its penetrating, cloying sweetness — the perfume of the public-house parlour at the Lion and the Lamb. He had a curious nightmare fancy, a figment of his disordered night. He fancied that he could see her, her hand upon her hip, looking over her shoulder at him with that insolent smile. At the sound of a distant closing door he started. Then, with an effort to pull himself together, he drew back the curtains and threw wide open the window, struck the air with the palms of his hands, as though to beat out into the misty void imaginary wisps of that hateful perfume. He staggered back into the sitting room and rang the bell.

"Fill my bath and ask one of the managers to come up," he directed the valet who answered it.

A suave young man, who spoke perfect English with a slightly foreign accent, presently made his appearance. He listened to David's story with the utmost politeness. He examined the severed cords of the telephone and the electric light with much concern.

"You say that your door was bolted, sir?" he enquired.

"Not only was my bedroom door bolted," David assured him, "but the door leading into the hall, and the communicating door between my sitting room and here was also bolted."

"You seem to have taken every precaution," the young man remarked.

"I had reason to," David confided. "I happen to know that there are people in London who are ill-disposed towards me."

The reception clerk moved across the room and gently tried the door connecting with the next apartment. It was fastened on the other side.

"Who is in there?" David enquired.

"I will ring down from your sitting room and ask, sir."

In due course the young man made his report. The apartment was unoccupied, also the apartment on the other side. With a pass-key, he opened the door. The room was a small one, and empty, but the bed had been slept in.

"What about that?" David demanded.

The hotel official was a little staggered. He went to the telephone which stood by the bedside and spoke again to the office. He was looking more thoughtful when he hung up the receiver.

"This room was let late last night," he announced, "through one of the waiters on our staff to a former patron of his, a Doctor Nadol, who left for Liverpool, by the newspaper train, to perform an operation."

The two men made their way back to David's room. The

reception clerk glanced once more at the defective cord of the telephone and electric bell, and regretted their threadbare condition.

"You are quite sure — you will pardon the suggestion, Mr. Newberry — that you did not have a nightmare last night?"

David swallowed hard. He pointed to the two severed cords. His companion shrugged his shoulders.

"There is always something to be explained," he murmured enigmatically.

"Do you think it possible," David asked him point-blank, "that I could have imagined, or invented, the story I have told you?"

The hotel clerk hesitated. He was so anxious to be polite, and yet equally anxious to believe that his client's suggestion, or something like it, was the real truth of the whole affair. He looked helplessly around the room.

"At present," he pointed out, "what explanation is possible? I shall make enquiries. If you will permit me, Mr. Newberry, we will speak of this later in the day."

He took his leave. David sat for a time in his easy-chair and reflected. One thing was absolutely certain. He had been entirely at the mercy of his late associates, who had every reason to fear him, and for some reason or other they had failed to strike home. He tried to argue with himself that they had really believed that he had secreted the Virgin's Tear, and having failed to gain his confidence, meant to set a watch upon him. They were perhaps too clever to kill the goose who knew all about the golden egg, yet it was not like the Lambs to leave a job undone. At the back of his mind there remained always that other, detestable, poisonous supposition. She had followed the murderers here, to save his life. It was she who had forced them to withdraw at the last moment. The idea horrified

him, and yet the more he dwelt upon it, the more fixed became his conviction. He even fancied that, notwithstanding the open window, he could still catch a breath of that perfume which he perhaps loathed all the more deeply because it brought with it a certain bestial allure.

He threw the window even wider open, rang for his breakfast, and drew the telephone book towards him. He found the number he sought, and rang up.

"Mr. Atkinson's house?" he asked. . . . "Good! Can I speak to Mr. Atkinson? Lord Newberry."

A moment later, a sleepy but anxious voice made reply.

"Look here, Atkinson," David said, "I'm awfully sorry to trouble you so early, but haven't I a small house in John Street? Used to belong to my two brothers? . . . Good! You haven't let it? Excellent! See that it's ready for me this afternoon. I'm moving in there. . . . Thanks. Goodbye."

David rose and stretched himself. Then he made his way towards the bathroom.

## CHAPTER VII

At precisely twelve o'clock that morning, David presented himself at Abbs' Gymnasium. He walked past the offices, past the collection of electrically driven horses, boats, and punch balls, and various other appliances for promoting muscular development, to the farther end of the room where Abbs himself was coaching a promising-looking couple of lightweights. At the end of the round, their instructor dismissed them, and came slowly across to his client. His manner was embarrassed, and he hesitated when David essayed to lead the way back to the office.

"Sorry, sir," he confessed, "but I'm afraid it's no use our going any further into that matter we were speaking of. I have decided against it."

David looked at him with hard, set eyes.

"Has any one been getting at you, Abbs?" he asked.

"I wouldn't put it like that, sir," the man replied uneasily. "I've been thinking it over, and I should only get into trouble if I were to help you to raise a gang in the way you suggest. Besides, they wouldn't have a chance. The other side are too strong."

"Is it a matter of money?" David enquired. "Shall I increase my offer?"

Abbs drew his visitor on one side out of the possible hearing of any loiterer. They mounted a few steps leading to the office, and left the little crowd of budding athletes behind them.

"It's not a matter of money, sir," he confided. "It's a matter of saving my life."

"I see," David remarked gravely. "They have been getting at you. I wonder how the deuce they found out?"

"You may as well know the truth now as later," Abbs sighed. "I've had it straight from a man who seems to know all about the gang you were connected with, and I've no fancy for being in their black books. He seems to have guessed what you were up to. Anyway, there it is. I value my skin more highly than to go any further with the business. That's with all due respect to you, sir."

David lit a cigarette and reflected for a minute. Then he laid his hand upon the other man's shoulder.

"Come into the office for a moment, Abbs," he invited.

"It wouldn't be of any use, sir," the man replied, shaking his head.

"Never mind. Come along," David insisted. "I'm going to put up another proposition to you."

They mounted the remaining steps, crossed the strip of floor, and entered the office. David glanced keenly at the two typists as he passed. One of them, a striking, flamboyant-looking young woman, with a pile of ill-coiffured, yellow hair, dark eyes and over-rouged lips, returned his gaze without flinching, with even a faint smile twitching at the corners of her lips. Except that she lacked altogether the wild-beast charm of the other woman, David shivered as he recognised the likeness.

"Send those girls out to lunch or something, Abbs," he directed. "I want to be alone with you. No listeners-in this time."

Abbs did as he was bidden, and it seemed to David, who was watching her, that the young woman whom he had especially noticed left with great reluctance. Even after she had closed the door behind her, she lingered outside the glass partition, as though to watch some of the exer-

cising going on below. It was not until Abbs, at his visitor's instigation, tapped upon the pane of glass, that she finally departed.

"You have some one to help you with this place, I suppose?" David enquired.

"I have taken Sammy West, the boxer, in, sir," Abbs replied. "He can put them through it all right, and he's as honest as the day."

"And how many pupils have you altogether?"

"Nigh on sixty."

"How much money have you sunk in the place?"

"Pretty well all of three thousand pounds," was the disconsolate admission. "A thousand of that I had to borrow from the bank."

"Is it paying?"

"No, it's not paying," Abbs acknowledged. "I don't say I'm losing a lot, but there's a trifle dribbles out every week. I reckon I want another thirty pupils to do any good, and then I couldn't afford the apparatus for them."

"You have two thousand of your own, hard-earned money in it," David reflected, "and already it's dwindling away. Got a lease of the premises?"

"Five years."

"I'll give you five thousand pounds for it, as it stands," David offered — "lease, good will, furniture and apparatus, cash down."

"What? Buy it outright?"

"That's the idea."

Abbs leaned upon the desk, his head between his hands. The wistful look in his face was almost pathetic.

"God, I'd love to do it," he muttered, "but the old man he'd have me for sure."

"Don't be a fool," his visitor enjoined. "You can walk straight out of this place to the other end of the world.

Tottie's a bad man in London, but he doesn't look far outside. You're a Welshman, aren't you?"

"Born in Aberystwith."

"Off you go there to-morrow then," David suggested. "Cut out everything here and get away clean. I'll add another couple of hundred to the cheque for travelling expenses and moving. What about it?"

Abbs, with a deep sigh, hesitated no longer.

"I'll do it, sir," he decided.

The place was empty, and the luncheon hour almost past, when Abbs, with a hearty handshake, took his final leave of the new owner of his boxing academy. David for some time wandered round the place alone. The first of the staff to reappear was Sammy West. David marched him up to the office.

"Heard the news, West?" he asked pleasantly.

Sammy West, a good-looking, freckled-faced, sturdy young man, who seemed as though nothing in the world would either disturb or surprise him, grinned.

"I had a pint with Tom Abbs on his way home," he confided. "He told me my job was all right, Mister."

"Your job's more than all right," David assured him. "What are you making at it?"

"Four quid a week. I couldn't ask Tom any more, because I knew he was barely making the place pay. My fights bring me in a bit too, of course."

"Go slow with the fighting for a time," David enjoined. "I don't want you knocked out just when you might be useful. It's ten pounds a week for you, West, if you'll carry out instructions."

Sam West scratched his head.

"I'd always rather have regular money, sir," he admitted.

"I'll tell you what I want you to do then," David continued. "Pick out the likely young men who come here for physical training, the adventurous ones, if you know what I mean, the young fellows who have got some insides to them, and enjoy a fight. Don't push out the others, but bring the likely ones together as much as you can. Train them with this one idea in your mind. I want them to be as quick as lightning on their feet, to keep keen and steady, and to acquire at any rate the elements of jiu jitsu. I want you to teach them this: that it's quite possible, at anything like close quarters, for them to tackle a man with either gun or knife, and put him out before he's had time to draw either. Do you get me, West? I want a band of fighters — clean, wholesome fighters — who are going to be clever enough with practice and discipline, to tackle some of these professional gangsters. Can it be done, do you think?"

"Aye, sure it can be done," Sammy West assented. "It's a rummy go, though, all the same."

"Not so very," David assured him. "I've got lots of money, Sam, and I'm a good player. There's a band of gangsters in this city to whom I owe the knock, and they're going to get it. You train the lads. I'll do the rest. As you fix upon the likely ones, drop charging them anything. There'll be big pay coming as soon as I can make use of them."

"I'll do my best," West promised, as he took his leave. "There's plenty of 'em are only too keen on a bit of a scrap. When I see them that way, I always encourage them. I always hold that fighting's the best sport in the world, when all's said and done."

The next arrivals, after the somewhat prolonged luncheon hour, were the two young lady typists. David opened the communicating door and called them into his office.

"Young ladies," he enquired, "how much do you get a week at this establishment?"

The girl who had previously shown her interest in him raised her eyebrows, but answered promptly.

"Three pounds each, and it isn't enough."

"Don't take your hats off," David begged. "Here's twelve pounds — a fortnight's pay. I've bought the business, and I have my own typists coming."

They both stared at him in amazement.

"Where's Mr. Abbs then?" the one who seemed to have appointed herself as spokesman demanded.

"Gone."

"What, never coming back?"

"Never coming back. Sold out. Retired. Gone for a cruise round the world."

"Why can't we stay on, please?" she pleaded. "If it's you who've bought the business, I should like to work for you."

He smiled.

"You'll consider it a trifling reason," he remarked, "unless you think it out, but I don't like the perfume you use."

She looked at him steadfastly for a moment. His face was like granite, his expression unyielding. She shrugged her shoulders. More than ever in that moment she seemed like an insignificant, and less alluring counterpart of that strange goddess of the Bermondsey public house.

"Come along, Aimée," she said, turning to her companion. "I think," she added, looking over her shoulder at David, "that you will repent of your bargain before you're much older."

## CHAPTER VIII

Lounging still on the edge of the couch, her hair tousled, her dress shamefully disarranged, her sleepy eyes only half open, she laughed a greeting at this unexpected visitor across the room.

"Daniel, come to revisit the Lion's Den," she mocked.

He looked away from her with a queer little shiver, half of distaste, half of anger with himself that her flamboyant witchery should have the power to stir in him even the faintest feeling.

"You flatter your Chief, or whatever you choose to call him," he said scornfully.

She glanced across at the sleeping figure of Tottie Green. His waistcoat, as usual, was unbuttoned, his trousers covered with cigar ash. There was an unhealthy flush upon his cheeks as he snored stertorously.

"Rather more like a spider than a lion," David continued, contemplating him in disgust. "You should stop him falling asleep sitting in that attitude. He'll have a fit one day. What an atmosphere! Don't you ever open the windows?"

"For an uninvited guest," she remarked, "you seem to me unnecessarily critical. And, anyway, what are you doing here? It isn't a healthy neighbourhood for you. Perhaps you've come to hand over the diamond."

"The Milan Court wasn't a particularly healthy neighbourhood either."

She smiled.

"They didn't hurt you. They went there meaning to put you out, but they changed their minds."

"What the devil made you interfere?" he asked swiftly.

She stared at him, her beautiful eyes wide open, her lips a little parted. This time he had certainly scored. Her armour of indifferent contempt had fallen away. She was startled.

"How did you know that I was there?" she demanded.

"I didn't exactly," he admitted. "I guessed. They certainly meant killing me. Something, or somebody, prevented them at the last moment. Was it you?"

She yawned.

"I'm always too tender-hearted," she lamented.

"How did you get there?"

"The same way that they did."

"And may I further enquire," he went on, "why you intervened?"

She had half risen from the couch, her hands, gleaming with rings, pressed against its back, supporting her.

"Do you complain?"

"On the contrary," he assured her hastily, "I come here full of gratitude. I still ask myself, however, why?"

She swung herself on to her feet, smoothed down her skirt, arranged her masses of hair for a moment with indolent fingers.

"I wonder why?" she ruminated. "However, I'll tell you, if you answer my question. How did you know that I'd been there?"

"Because," he confided, "you happen to use a very pungent and penetrating perfume. I detected traces of it when I came to this morning."

She sighed.

"What a mistake to be kind," she murmured. "You see what happens to me. I stayed with you for an hour after

the others had left, to be sure that no further harm came to you, and I pay for it in this way. I am detected. Shall you denounce me, David? Shall you have me arrested for trespassing in the sacred precincts of the Milan Court?"

"I have already acknowledged," he reminded her, "that I have every reason to be grateful for your presence there. I have answered your question. What about mine?"

For a single moment he was startled by the light which flashed out of her eyes. Then, even as he looked at her, it was gone. The old mockery was there, half challenging, half scornful.

"You have cast a spell upon me," she declared. "I could not bear the thought of losing you. You are the only person likely to keep us alive in these days. The police have ceased even to amuse us. You, on the other hand, make life worth living. You strike terror into our souls. You are going to root us out and exterminate us. Poor Daddy Green! Poor little worried Lambs; how they must all be fretting!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Mind if I take a seat?" he asked. "Your illustrious Chief shows no signs of waking up, and I am in no hurry. Perhaps you would honour me by trying one of my cigarettes."

He moved across the room to her, his flat gold case invitingly opened. As they stood together, he realised that she was as tall as he. He realised, too, with unwilling and rebellious admiration, the grace of her body, so slightly concealed by the flimsy nature of her apparel. She accepted the cigarette and passed him a little fragment of cambric she had been holding.

"Recognise it?"

He bent over it and nodded.

"I should know the perfume anywhere."

"Made for me in Grasse," she told him, "undistilled. I like my perfumes, as I like everything else in life — strong. Do you care for it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"For one reason," he replied, "I like a perfume which belongs to one woman only. This, I have met with before to-day, even since I left the Milan Court."

She sighed.

"That terrible little girl at Abbs'," she murmured. "She stole half a bottle once, and now I have to lock it up to keep it from her. She does typing for Reuben twice a week, dresses like me, dyes her hair, and hopes for the best."

"She isn't at Abbs' any longer," he told her.

"How do you know?"

"I sent her away this morning."

"You sent her away? What had you to do with it?"

"I've bought the business."

She threw herself into an easy-chair and rocked with laughter.

"Oh, David," she lamented, "why aren't you sensible? What's the use to you of all those youths in Abbs' Gymnasium who have taken cheap boxing lessons? Why not come and join up here again? You would find a welcome. You can work with me, if you like."

He shook his head.

"I have crossed the border line," he declared. "I am with the law now, not against it."

She scanned his Savile Row clothes, his generally well-turned-out appearance.

"Going to live on the Virgin's Tear, I suppose?"

"I never brought the Virgin's Tear away," he assured her.

"All my eye!" she scoffed, leaning a little farther back in her chair. "Where did your money come from then? You hadn't a bob when you went to prison, and you never even took away the fifty pounds the old man left for you, or your share of the Frankley money."

"Where did my money come from?" David repeated thoughtfully. "Well, once more I'll answer your question if you'll answer mine."

"Go ahead," she invited.

"Precisely what relation are you to Tottie Green, and what are you doing in this *galère?*"

"In this what?"

"In this company. Cannon Ball Lem, for instance; Reuben, Fishy Tim — whom I haven't seen, by-the-by, since I came out? I expect he's sulking somewhere."

"You'd have seen him last night if you'd been an owl," she confided. "He was at the foot of your bed, and he was the one who wanted to put you out. And no fool, either. He and Reuben will both have to tow the line some day."

"What about answering my question?" he interrupted.

"Why should I?" she rejoined lazily. "Don't you think that I belong?"

"In a way," he agreed. "Not altogether, though. I can imagine you driving the people crazy at the Moulin Rouge. I can imagine you being the inspiration of a matador at Barcelona, or the favourite of a millionaire sugar planter at Cuba, but I can't imagine you hanging round with Tottie Green, unless there was some reason for it."

"There is," she answered. "He is my father's partner, and I am going to wake him up. As for my question, you needn't answer it. I don't care where your money came from, or whether you've got any or not. The only thing I'd say to you is this. If you've got the Virgin's Tear any-

where in pawn and are living on that, chuck it and play the game. The lads will get you for it, and I sha'n't always be around to beg you off."

She rose to her feet and crossed the room towards where he was seated, walking with swaying hips, a crude, animal grace in all her movements. She lingered for a moment before him, challenged his eyes, and laughed at his momentary discomfiture.

"You're a very foolish young man," she said. "I think that you're afraid of me. One day you will come after me, and then perhaps I sha'n't want you."

She lingered still for an imperceptible fragment of time. One of her hands, with its load of jewels, and over-manicured nails, rested upon his shoulder, a breath of that curious perfume momentarily confused his senses. Then she passed on and approached the sleeping object upon the chair. Her method of awakening him was curiously gentle. She stroked one side of his face until his breathing gradually subsided, and his eyes opened. He looked around for a moment vaguely. Then he saw David, and his hand slid into the drawer of the table which stood by his side.

"Don't worry," his visitor enjoined. "I'm not armed."

He rose to his feet and strolled across the room. The sight of the two — the man looking like a great, overgrown human spider, and the girl bending over him in her Shaftesbury Avenue clothes, which still seemed marvellously designed to display her glorious figure — her silky masses of ill-coiffured hair, her over-bejewelled hands, the little stabs of perfume which seemed to dart out from her body, filled him with a queer sort of revulsion.

"You don't need to look for your gun, Tottie Green," he continued. "I don't go in for that sort of thing. You ought to know that."

"Are you going to play straight?" the awakened man

asked, struggling to raise himself into a sitting position. "Are you coming back?"

"I am not," was the firm reply.

"Then what the hell are you here for, anyway?"

"Curiosity for one thing. You got your lads into my room last night by some devilish means. I came to see why they didn't make a job of it?"

The man in the chair pointed a dirty, stubby forefinger at the girl.

"She wouldn't let them," he jeered. "Got a fit of softheartedness, or else she thought we could work you better alive."

"She thought wrong then," David observed. "I'm going to be a nuisance to you, Tottie Green."

The Chief's waistcoat rose and fell spasmodically. It seemed to be a sign from inside that he was moved to mirth.

"It would take more than a toff like you to worry me or my lads," he replied scornfully. "Better cough up the diamond, young man."

"If you mean the Virgin's Tear, I don't happen to have it," David declared tersely.

A voice, low-pitched but softly venomous, came from behind the screened doorway.

"You're a damned liar!"

## CHAPTER IX

David and the girl turned swiftly around. Tottie Green succeeded in raising himself slightly in his chair. Reuben had opened the door noiselessly and was standing a few feet away. He was dressed, as usual, with the quiet precision of a lawyer's clerk, or some better-class tradesman. There was certainly little of the strikingly criminal in his appearance, except for the eyes, set too close together, and a most unprepossessing-looking mouth. There was a momentary blaze in David's eyes as he recognised him.

"Reuben Grossett!" he exclaimed. "I was hoping that you would have the courage to show yourself. What was that very unpleasant word you used?"

"If you say that you didn't take the Virgin's Tear, you're a damned liar," the young man repeated, "because I saw you with it in your hand."

There was a moment's silence. Tottie Green was breathing heavily. They all stared at David.

"You didn't appear to me to be looking about much," the latter observed calmly. "The last I saw of you, you were running away like a frightened rabbit, with Lem at your heels, and with only one idea — to save your own rotten skin."

There was venom enough now in Reuben's face. He took a half step forward but checked himself. His clenched fists were white at the knuckles. A slight and sinister parting of the lips had revealed his rather prominent teeth.

"I didn't run until I saw the game was up," he protested

fiercely. "I looked over my shoulder before I got to the door. You were just drawing something out of the smaller box. I saw the light on it. I knew at once that it was the Virgin's Tear. Then you started coming after us — too far behind, though, to have a chance. The newspapers told us the rest. The Virgin's Tear had never been in the safe. It was in the box where you found it. I tell you, you swine," he went on, raising his voice and throwing out a long, skinny forefinger, "I saw you take it. Do you hear that, Tottie Green? I saw him take it. Now, what's he got to say?"

They all leaned a little towards David. There was a very unpleasant-looking flush in Tottie Green's cheeks, and something almost like a rattle in his windpipe. Even in the girl's face was reflected something of that greedy lust which had possessed her two associates. Tottie Green burst into speech, and his voice seemed to have risen by octaves. It was like the squeak of a greedy pig.

"Fifty thousand pounds I can get in Amsterdam for that stone!" he cried. "You were working for the Lambs, and it belongs to the Lambs. You'll hand it over, or they'll put you somewhere where the money won't help."

The girl spoke slowly, a little contemptuously, flinging the words from her, as though she meant them to sting.

"I saved your life last night, Dave," she reminded him. "I suppose I must have had a queer sort of fancy for you. I forbade what they wanted to do. I believed your word. I didn't believe that you had the diamond. Reuben had never spoken out so plainly. If what he has just said is the truth, I don't imagine that I shall interfere again."

David changed his position slightly. He leaned against the table, facing his three accusers.

"Once more, Miss Belle," he said, "I thank you for saving my life. I thank you profoundly."

He bowed — a gesture of gratitude which had in it a spice of mockery. Then he turned to the two men.

"You shall now hear the truth," he announced, addressing himself chiefly to Tottie Green. "You will remember that in every attempt Reuben and his friend Lem have made to explain away their cowardly action in locking the door between me and safety, so that they both had a better chance to escape, they have denied that either of them ever saw me behind. They believed that I was making my escape in some other direction. Now Reuben is telling the truth. He confesses to what I knew all the time."

"You can cut that out," Tottie Green squeaked. "They behaved rotten, but that isn't the point. What about the Virgin's Tear?"

"Reuben is telling the truth," David admitted. "I had an idea that the Virgin's Tear was in that box, but as I took it out, a door opened behind me, and I saw the girl who was standing there. I bolted then, like the others, and, as I have told you before, I didn't bring the diamond away with me. If I had, it would have been upon me when I was arrested."

Reuben was swift with his flashed-out question.

"If you didn't dispose of it some way, why do you suppose the owners got paid for it by the Insurance Company? They wouldn't dare to rig a show like that. Besides, the diamond would never be of any use to them afterwards."

"I did not bring the diamond away with me," David said, slowly and distinctly.

"What did you do with it then? Where did you hide it? Who fetched it away?" Reuben intervened, in a tone of almost agonised appeal. "Look at him, Daddy. He had nothing on him when he went in. Here he is now a bloody toff. He wouldn't touch your fifty quid or his share of what the rest of the jewels brought. Comes down here in a

motor car, stays at a swell hotel, talks of hiring a band of Abbs's babies to wipe us out. Where did he get the stuff? I'll tell you. He parked the diamond somewhere and got a pal to fetch it. That was his game, and a clever enough one, too. The only thing is, we ain't going to stand for it. We've shown him what we can do already. Next time, Belle had better keep her mouth shut."

David's earlier moments of anger had passed. He was tense and watchful, but completely at his ease. He tapped and lit a cigarette.

"My present condition of opulence," he explained, "is not due in any way to the Virgin's Tear. Whilst I was in the prison, to which the cowardice of this young man and Reuben condemned me, some relatives died, and, curiously enough — jailbird though I was — their property came to me. That is the exact truth. If your intelligence department, Tottie Green, had been what it is reputed to be, you would have found that out before. By inheritance — that's how my wealth came to me. Miss Belle, look at me for a moment. . . . That's right! You believe me, I can see."

She turned her head and looked steadily at him. For a moment he regretted his challenge. The girl had a witchery of eyes and lips which was utterly indescribable.

"Yes, you may be telling the truth, David," she acknowledged. "Still, since you appeal to me, perhaps you will explain this. If you didn't bring away the Virgin's Tear, exactly what did you do with it after you had taken it out of the box?"

David sighed and flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"I knew the cleverest of you three would ask me that before long," he said. "What did I do with it? Well, to tell you the truth, I can't remember."

There was a sinister little murmur of angry contempt from the two men. The girl laughed openly.

"You don't suppose you can get away with that, do you?" Reuben demanded.

"Just as I was holding the diamond in my hand," David went on, unmoved, "as I have already told you, the door behind me opened. I looked round, and there was a girl, or rather a child, as beautiful as a picture, in blue silk pyjamas, watching me without a shadow of fear on her face, as though I were some part of a show. Beyond her, I could see lights, and I could hear the whispering voices of people creeping up the stairs. I never thought another thing about the diamond. I ran for safety. I thought I should just reach the door before they could catch me, but I didn't realise what skunks I was working with. As you know, when I was at bay, I chose to fight, and when they'd finished with me, I was unconscious. When I came to in hospital, I had forgotten all about the Virgin's Tear. One does forget these things, you know, after a concussion of the brain."

There was a queer little silence. Tottie Green leaned over the side of his chair, filled his glass half full of whisky, and added a splash of water. He drank noisily and gulpily, and when he set down the glass, it was half empty. Reuben moistened his lips with his tongue.

"So that's the story at last, is it? That's the story you're going to ask us to believe?"

David nodded carelessly.

"Couldn't imagine what you meant by the Virgin's Tear at first," he explained. "Those last few minutes seemed to go out of my mind altogether. Ever had concussion of the brain? Funny thing, you know. Wipes everything clean out of your memory for the time."

Reuben Grossett's hand was moving stealthily towards his hip pocket, but the girl stopped him.

"Nothing of that sort here, Reube," she insisted. "You

know the Chief wouldn't have it. Besides, dead men aren't any use to us. You should get him down to the Nursing Home and make him talk."

"I wish I had him there now," the young man groaned.

"Belle's right," Tottie Green chuckled. "We want the truth out of him first. No rough-house work here, either. They won't stand for it downstairs, and I can't be disturbed. This has been my room for twenty years now, and I love it."

"Then you have the rottenest taste of any one I ever knew," David declared. "I can't imagine how a man of wealth who occupies the proud position, too, of Chief of the Lambs, can be content with such a hole."

"What's wrong with it?" Tottie Green growled.

David looked around in disgust.

"Why, the whole place stinks of stale drinks and foul tobacco smoke. There isn't a window which opens, an article of furniture you can look at without shivering. What do you think, Miss Belle?"

"Never mind what I think," she answered, her eyes still fixed upon Reuben, who was standing in an ominous posture between David and the door. "What I say goes, though, and don't you forget it, Reube. He's going to fade away, and you can get him when you want him. If not, I'll do it for you. It might be a little difficult," she added, moving nearer to him and patting him on the shoulder, "but I could do it. Don't you think I could, David?"

He flicked what seemed to be a speck of dust from the sleeve of his coat where her hand had rested, met her eyes, and drew back with a momentary distaste from that flood of enervating perfume.

"Well, I won't boast," he said, "but I'm not really a lady's man. I should advise you to stick to your own sub-

jects. Cannon Ball Lem, for instance, always seems to me to be possessed of a nice susceptibility."

She heard him without the shadow of offence, for she had seen the lines in his face tighten as he spoke. He took up his hat and stick.

"If no one has any more to say to me," he concluded, "I imagine there is no need to prolong this interview."

Tottie Green banged with his heavy stick upon the floor. For a moment, he resembled a human being. There was a new sternness in his face, a new force in his words.

"Listen here, David," he pronounced, "you're a sworn Lamb, and you're not free. You haven't won your quittance yet, and you don't seem likely to. It's rubbish to say that you don't remember what you did with a fifty-thousand-pound diamond. Seems to me likely that you made a damned clever hide of it."

"It's a bloody cert," Reuben Grossett muttered.

"You ain't going to get away with this, you know, David," Tottie Green went on. "It's never been done yet on my crowd or me, and it never will. It's hard enough now to get these lads to keep their hands off you, but, as I tell them, we don't need to run the risk ourselves. We've a dozen toughs down Limehouse way who'd put out your light for an extra tenner, and be glad to. You listen to me. I ain't bragging. I don't threaten. I say the word, and the thing happens. Are you going to tell us what you did with that diamond?"

Despite the repulsiveness of the man, his coarseness, the foul decay of his physical self, there was something impressive about the earnestness with which he spoke. Even David abandoned his insouciance.

"My late Chief," he said, moving a little towards the door, "I have told you all that I feel able to about the Virgin's Tear."

He continued his progress across the room. From the threshold, he looked back. Neither of the three had moved. He turned the handle of the door. They were all facing him, but no one spoke a word. He descended the staircase with the queer conviction that there was something more sinister in their silence than in threatening words.

## CHAPTER X

Abbs's Gymnasium for sport, gymnastics, and physical culture was going stronger than ever. David, who had been occupied in close conference with Sammy West, looked down the long corridor with satisfaction.

"Full house to-night, Sam," he observed.

Sammy West, whose appearance was a little marred by the rough handling which he had recently received in a rather too ambitious match, assented vigorously.

"I can't hardly keep them away, sir," he confided. "I followed out your instructions, though — no Sunday-school young men, no weedy-shouldered ones, no whimperers. They don't understand it when they bring the money, but there you are. I tell 'em we'll take them later on. Young men with grit, born fighters, that's what you're looking for, sir, ain't it?"

"It is, indeed," David assented.

Sammy West coughed.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he went on, after a brief pause, "would it be too much to ask exactly what all this is leading up to? I've had my instructions, and they're right enough. I've got to train a band of fifty or sixty young fellows that can hold their own in a street fight, and teach them the low-down tricks of these East End gangs. I'm getting on fine, sir. I could take a dozen young men out to-day, and back them to smash up any other dozen in a scrap you could find anywhere, but what's it all leading to? You ain't throwing all this money away for

nothing. It is this special gang who did you dirty you're after?"

"You shall know all about it before long, Sam," his employer promised. "Meanwhile, I should like to ask your opinion about a theory of mine."

"Certainly, sir."

David rose to his feet and paced the narrow confines of the office. A single typist, a young man, was at work in the room below. There was no one within hearing.

"My theory is," David continued, "that a young fellow quick on his feet, who knows something about jiu jitsu, especially the wrist tricks, is equal at close quarters to any of these gangsters who carry knives and guns."

Sam West was a little grave.

"I'm not sure that I'm quite with you there, sir."

"Well, you must admit this," David insisted. "It takes time either to draw a gun or pull a knife. If a man can get at close quarters, he can stop either. He's top dog then because he has his hands free, and he is better on his balance, if you understand me, than the man who has been making a gesture. What he has to do, of course, is to be sure of getting at close quarters. From a dozen paces, for instance, he wouldn't have a chance against a gun. He must be careful not to be caught at a dozen paces, that's all."

"It needs a bit of pluck, you know, to tackle some of these gangsters unarmed," Sam West declared.

"I don't want men around me who haven't got a bit of pluck," was the curt reply. "You have plenty yourself, I know, West. The great point is that I want them trained with this idea — close fighting all the time. Plenty of wrist and elbow work. Look here, Sam," he went on. "Stand on the edge of that linoleum, a yard and a half away from me. . . . Yes, that's about the spot. Now, you have a

knife in that pocket — a special pocket, of course, just below your waistcoat — and you have a gun in your hip pocket. When I count three, see what you can do. Don't tell me which you are going for."

They stood opposite one another, Sam West perhaps an inch taller than his employer, his hands quivering, his eyes watching for his opponent's first movement. David stood like a rock, except that one foot was slightly in front of the other. His eyes were like points of steel. He counted. One — two — three. Sammy West's sudden cry of pain startled the young typist below. His right hand, seized whilst it was still several inches from his trouser pocket, was bent and twisted in an iron grasp. David's right fist could at any moment have knocked him out. The latter stepped back with a smile.

"You see what I mean, Sam," he pointed out. "At that distance, you couldn't have reached gun or knife. You chose the easier, and I got you. Before you could have made an effort even to get your wrist away, I could have hammered you unconscious."

"You got me all right, sir," the man acknowledged ruefully. "It would take me some time, though, to train my lads to be as quick as that. I don't know where you picked it up, but I'd be sorry for the gangster who tried to tackle you."

"I picked it up during some of my years of wandering in Australia," David admitted, with a reminiscent smile. "I had no end of jobs there, and one was in an academy of this sort."

Sammy West rubbed his wrist lightly. Suddenly he paused and stood rigid. He seemed to be listening intently.

"What's wrong?" David asked him.

Sam moved towards the door.

"I thought I heard a queer sort of noise, same as I

heard in the entry last night, sir," he confided. "Like as though there were the footsteps of three or four men with gummies on — sort of shuffling. I was talking to half a dozen of the boys — making a bit of a noise, we were — and by the time we got out there was no one to be seen. Follow me quietly, sir."

The two men crept on tiptoe to the door. Here once more Sam West paused to listen. Outside was the sound of muffled voices.

"Some one who isn't up to any good," David whispered. "Open the door quietly, Sam. . . . That's right! Now then!"

The two men took a quick step out into the entry. It was a dark night, with a few drops of rain falling, but at close quarters it was easy to discern several shadowy forms.

"Hi! What are you fellows doing around here?" Sam shouted.

Two of them were edging away, but, moving swiftly, he blocked the passage.

"What the hell business is that of yours?" one of the three retorted. "This entry ain't private property."

"It leads to nowhere except my warehouse," was the prompt reply. "Come here, and let's have a look at you."

"And what the mischief are you doing on the window sill?" David demanded, as a man slid on to the ground. "No, you don't!"

The man who had tried to escape by rushing past David found himself suddenly tackled. They swayed together for a moment. Even in the dim light, David saw a thin, skinny hand steal downwards. In a moment, there was a yell of pain, and the youth was lying writhing on his back. The knife went flashing over the wall into the small churchyard alongside.

"Get up!" David ordered. "You're going to get something for this."

The man, unexpectedly released, sprang to his feet and rushed in. A moment later, he was lying once more on his back, and this time voiceless. David swung round just in time to dodge a blow from one of the other marauders. A few yards back stood a third man with something that looked like a machine gun stretched out before him.

"Take care, Sam!" David cried.

His momentary inattention nearly cost him dear, for the man with whom he had closed, taking a swift step sideways, kicked him on the shins. He staggered, barely escaping an upper cut. He swayed for a moment, recovered himself, feinted with his right, and finally got his left home, with a sickening crash on to his opponent's mouth. Swinging round, he made for the man, from whose strange instrument was pouring a stream of what seemed to be water. He turned the instrument towards David, and his left hand went into his coat pocket. David, mystified, ducked and went for the man, but this time Sam was the quickest. The man went crashing against the iron railing, and the instrument he had been holding fell clattering on to the stone flags. David went down on his knees and felt in the pocket of the unconscious man against the railings. He drew out something which felt like a prickly ball and flung it against one of the tombstones. It burst instantly into flames.

"Take off your coat, Sam," David called out, as he stood upright. "You're soused with petrol!"

He stood up and took breath. The second man was twitching a little, but the man who had slipped from the window sill was still unconscious.

"Can't you see the game?" David continued. "They came to set fire to the place. Sam, listen to me."

Sam, who had torn off his coat and waistcoat, stood to attention.

"That first man," David went on, "I want him. Drag him through the door. We'll hand the other two over to the police. Quick, or we shall have some one here."

Sam raised their first victim by his armpits and dragged him through the door. He returned with an electric torch and followed by a little stream of eagerly enquiring young men and instructors.

"Some one trying to burn this place down," David announced. "Fetch a policeman, one of you. And listen, not a word about the man inside. I know who he is — Dick Ebben — and he may be useful to us. Get him into my office, some of you."

They were only just in time. A lantern flashed at the bottom of the entry, and a policeman and sergeant came hurrying up.

"What's wrong here?" the latter demanded, looking at the two men, the one groaning, and the other still unconscious, the smashed hydrant, and the pool of petrol.

"We caught these two men trying to set fire to my gymnasium," David explained. "You'll find some fireballs in that man's pocket, and you see they have a hydrant full of petrol."

The sergeant whipped out his pocketbook.

"Name and address, sir?" he enquired.

"David Newberry, Number 17a, John Street," David replied. "I've just bought the gymnasium from Abbs."

"That's right, sir," the policeman, who was a friend of Sammy West, put in. "This chap here's copped one of Sammy's," he went on, turning to the sergeant with a grin.

"Looks to me like a hospital case first," the sergeant remarked.

He bent over the man by the railing. When he stood up-

right again, he was gazing at something in his hand.

"Gunman," he muttered. "Jim, there's an ambulance pillar at the corner. Better have it round. Attempted arson, eh? We'll send them off, sir, and take particulars from you later on."

"That suits me," David agreed. "I shall be here for half an hour, and afterwards at Number 17a John Street."

The sergeant was exceedingly well content.

"I'm not quite sure, sir," he confided, "but I rather fancy we've laid our hands upon, or rather you have for us, a couple of a very dangerous band of gangsters."

"I hope you're right, Sergeant," David observed, as he turned away.

## CHAPTER XI

It was at least a quarter of an hour before the man who had been dragged into the gymnasium opened his eyes. He looked about him vaguely. He had a general sense that something had gone wrong, but he was not in the least sure as to what it was. Then he saw David coming towards him, and disagreeable memories began to assert themselves.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

"You are at the present moment," David confided, "in one of the dressing rooms of the gymnasium you tried to set fire to. If you talk loudly, or make any sort of a noise, you will be on your way to the police station within a very short time. Nasty crime, arson, you know, Ebben. You might easily get five years for it."

The captured man staggered to his feet, but collapsed into a chair.

"Just my luck to be pinched," he groaned. "What happened to the others?"

"As a matter of fact," David told him, "you're rather in luck. The others are at the police station by this time. Up to the present you are free."

The young man blinked suspiciously.

"Who are you getting at?" he growled.

"I'm telling you the truth," was the cool reply. "I saved you from arrest for a reason of my own. I shall very likely hand you over to the police presently. That depends."

"You're not kidding?"

"I am not kidding. Before we called the police in, I had

you dragged in here out of the way. You can earn your freedom if you want to, or you can go and join your pals, and take a five years' stretch with them."

The young man's teeth chattered.

"I don't want to get copped," he confided eagerly. "They've got too much against me. What is it you want me to do, Guv'nor?"

David turned on an extra electric light.

"Do you recognise me, Ebben?" he asked.

The man stared for a moment. Then an exclamation broke from his lips.

"Crickey, it's Dave!"

"Yes, that's right," David assented, "and you're Dick Ebben. I know a bit about you, Ebben — a little that you know about, and a little that you don't know about. I know something that Tottie Green doesn't know, or you'd have had yours a year ago."

The young man began to shake silently. He was very nearly in a paroxysm of fear.

"You're wrong, Dave!" he cried. "You got the wrong idea about me. I heard what the cop said to you in hospital. They say anything, those fellows. He wanted to get a bit more out of you. Oh, Gawd, you hit me hard!"

David regarded his late opponent critically. Then he rose to his feet, unlocked a cupboard, and produced a bottle of brandy. He poured some into a glass.

"Drink this," he enjoined shortly. "I didn't hit you as hard as you deserved, or you'd have been in the mortuary by this time. Drink that down and try to listen to me."

The young man clutched at the glass. He drank the contents slowly and yet feverishly, in long, appreciative gulps.

"Gawd, that's the stuff!" he muttered, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Get on with it, Dave. I can talk to you now."

"To begin with, then, don't call me Dave," the other ordered. "Our brief association ended twelve months ago."

"I beg your pardon," the young man squirmed. "I don't know what's happened, but I see you're quite the toff now."

"Whatever I am makes no difference to you," David said. "Get this into your head. I know you squealed about the Frankley burglary. I know that I have only to tell Tottie Green just what I know about you, Dick Ebben, and you'd be a great deal safer in prison for five years."

The young man's fingers and the muscles of his face were twitching.

"Give me some more brandy," he begged; "another half a glass of that brandy."

David poured him out a second portion and watched him drink it down.

"So 'elp me, Gawd —"

"Chuck it!" David interrupted. "I know all I want to know about you, Dick Ebben. I can make use of you. I can save you a knife in your ribs, or five years in prison. Are you ready to listen?"

The young man grovelled.

"Dave — Mr. David," he began, "if you keep your mouth shut, there isn't anything I wouldn't do on God's earth. Now listen —"

"No, listen to me instead," David insisted. "I'll keep you out of this arson case if I can. The police don't know there was another man in it; I sha'n't tell them. You can hide here all night if you like. I'll lend you some different clothes. You can go away when you choose. But you've got to pay."

"What is it you want?" the man gasped.

"You've squealed before for trifles," David continued, "because you're a squealer by nature. Now you're going to

squeal for something worth while, but you're going to do it for me."

"For you?" Ebben faltered. "Where do you come in with this?"

"I'm out with the gang," David explained. "I'm up against them, Ebben. I'm going to see they get what they deserve. They sold me at Frankley, and they think they can get away with it. They can't. Know what this place is?"

"Some sort of a gymnasium, ain't it?"

"You're not so far from the mark. You might call it a fighting academy and be done with it. Do you know why you were on an expedition here to-night to burn it down?"

"So 'elp me, Gawd, I don't know!" the young man insisted vehemently. "It was just orders — orders."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead with his coat sleeve. He was alert enough now, recovered with the help of the brandy.

"Listen to me, Da — I beg your pardon, Guv'nor," he begged; "the whole show gets me scared blue sometimes. That old man in the chair, the way he looks at me — it's as though he knew. Jesus, it gives me the shivers! He don't tell me nothing now. Just hands me orders. Gun and knife, fire balls and petrol, same as we burnt down Reinberg's place in Cannon Street with. Two years ago, the old man would have told me all about it — never opened his mouth this time. They got me scared."

David nodded thoughtfully.

"I expect you're right, Ebben," he agreed. "There's something about that old man, Tottie Green, that isn't exactly human — sees into the souls of men, reads the thoughts at the backs of their heads. A nasty business that, you know. Well, you take my advice, Ebben. You're going to get a thousand pounds from me before many

weeks are past. The day you touch, you board one of those Glasgow steamers for Montreal."

The young man moistened his lips.

"Gawd, I'm in for it," he muttered.

"Tottie's a dangerous fellow," David went on, "but he's only local. He can't touch you so long as you're not around just underneath his thumb."

"That thousand quid?" Ebben demanded feverishly.

David strolled to the door of the dressing room and beckoned to Sammy West, who was repairing a boxing glove.

"This is my partner," he said. "Ebben, this is what you have to do. I want to know the nights the Lambs come out. I want to know how many of them are coming, and where they're going. We're not the police, mind. The police will never get a word from me. We're on a private enterprise. We want to fight the Lambs."

Sammy West chuckled.

"There's two of them that ain't going to count for much for the next five years," he declared. "Good and proper they got it, too."

"To-night's business," David proceeded, "ought to help you to realise, Dick Ebben, that the Lambs aren't invincible. I know your position, you see. You're still Reuben's secretary. You are the man who copies out the directions and hands them out. Very well. What about their next big show?"

Ebben crept a little nearer, though the room was large and empty.

"A thousand quid," he muttered.

"That's the precise sum," David assented. "That's the blood money, Ebben."

"It's a bargain," the young man agreed hoarsely. "I'll risk it. I don't care. There's a big show coming on, but

mind you, Guv'nor," he added, "I'll have my thousand quid when I've told you, but unless you bring in the police, they'll make dirt of you. There ain't no amateurs in this world can stand up to a knife-and-gun Lamb."

"That's our lookout," David declared. "Sam, give him a shakedown here for the night, and lend him some clothes in the morning to get away with. You can make up your own story to Tottie Green as to how you escaped, but mind you, Ebben, if you try to double-cross us, you can crawl underneath one of those tombstones outside as soon as you like. You'll be for it, my lad, and don't you forget it."

The young man shivered.

"I'm for that thousand quid and Montreal," he moaned, with almost pathetic vehemence.

## CHAPTER XII

Glendower, who hated the woman, nevertheless made a point of crossing the crowded drawing-room of a mutual acquaintance and accosting Agatha Kendrig. He was warmly enough received, but he cut short her gush of cordiality.

"What about David, Lady Agatha?" he asked her.

She raised her eyebrows — a very favourite gesture of hers. She was inclined to be sandy, but she had dark eyebrows, of which she was very proud. She led the Marquis towards a neighbouring divan.

"Really, Lord Glendower," she began impressively, "I can't tell you how much I have been upset by this terrible calamity which has fallen upon our family. We have seen so little of you and the dear Marchioness lately that I have not had the opportunity of discussing it with you. Can you imagine anything more appalling than the present situation?"

"Well, I think I could, with an effort," was the curt reply. "Anyhow, I should be glad to have your point of view. Rather fond of David myself, you know, in the old days, and — you won't mind — truth's the best policy — I thought he was damned badly treated."

"We probably none of us," Lady Agatha declared with dignity, "know the whole history. His father may seem to have been stern, but I believe — I do believe," she added, looking earnestly up into her companion's face — "that there were many happenings of which we never heard. David's record, as you know, has been shameful, and this

last episode, of course, heart-breaking. Fancy the head of the family — the titular head of the family — in prison!"

Glendower moved a little uneasily in his place.

"Well, that's over and finished with, you know," he reminded her. "The question is, what about David now? Seems to me he wants a leg-up. What are you people doing about it?"

"What can we do?" Lady Agatha demanded appealingly. "He has had the grace not to go straight down and live at Newberry, but do you know, I wrote to his lawyers and I wrote to him, offering to occupy it for a year or so, for the family's sake. I had no reply from David, and only a very official letter from Mr. Atkinson to say that Lord Newberry had no intention of 'letting' — *'letting,'* mind you — 'the house at present.' "

"Why should he?" Glendower enquired. "He's plenty of money. Lots of men don't like letting their houses. I don't, for one. I let my shooting in Scotland one year to some foreigners. Quite enough for me. What are you complaining about?"

"But don't you know what David has done?" she continued pathetically.

"No, I should like to know," Glendower replied. "I can't hear anything definite about him at all."

"He has taken over that little house in John Street, that Father bought for Harold and Clarence, and shut himself up in it — absolutely shut himself up. Would you believe this now? It took me a long time to make up my mind to do it, but I did. I went to call. I took Matthew with me. And what do you think happened?"

"No idea," the Marquis murmured, with a faint anticipatory smile at the corners of his lips.

"Dowson opened the door to us — Dowson, who has been in the family for thirty years, mind you. I told him that

I had come to see Lord Newberry, and what do you suppose his reply was?"

The Marquis remained blandly interrogative.

"'Lord Newberry,' he announced, standing with the door knob still in his hand, 'is not receiving visitors at present.'"

"That's like the lad," the Marquis chuckled.

"But I, his sister," she protested, "and Matthew, his brother-in-law! Very distinguished man, Matthew — Privy Councillor and Member of Parliament — so much his elder, too. I had hard work to get Matthew to accompany me. Don't you think that David ought to have realised the immense benefit he would derive from the recognition of such a man?"

"Ah, well, yes. I'm sure I don't know," Glendower answered doubtfully.

Lady Agatha continued to vent her annoyance.

"And I, his sister," she went on, "left on the doorstep, if you please, with Dowson, our old servant, refusing to let me into the house, and a couple of footmen behind — such men you never saw — looking like prize fighters, and yet wearing our liveries — and I wasn't allowed to go in! David was 'not receiving at present'! And you can sit there and ask me what we're doing about David after that!"

"Well, of course I didn't know," Glendower confessed, "but I do say that we ought all to have every consideration for him. You may be ready enough to receive him now, but the whole lot of you treated him like dirt when he was down and out. He's bound to resent it a little. He'll come around, I daresay."

"But, Lord Glendower," she remonstrated, "think! David has just come out of prison, where he has been serving a disgraceful sentence for burglary and assault, and

here I take Matthew to hold out the olive branch, and that is the message — 'Lord Newberry' — my brother, mind you — 'is not receiving at present.' And Matthew, one of the prominent financiers, and one of the most popular men in the City, standing by my side! I never heard of such treatment! There are heaps of things I want to know about. What is David going to do with his property? There's Clarence growing up. What is his future going to be? David can't mean, after all that has happened, to settle down in England."

"Dowson didn't give you any hint as to how he was passing the time, I suppose?" Glendower asked thoughtfully. "I've heard one or two rather queer rumours. Nothing detrimental, but a little disturbing."

"Dowson gave me no idea about anything," Lady Agatha confided. "Not one word of information did he give me in reply to all my questions — I who had been his mistress for all these years. Tell me at once, dear Marquis, what were these rumours you heard? What sort of things are they saying about David?"

"Oh, nothing that would interest you particularly," was the vague reply. "Funny business altogether. I don't mind telling you that I've tried to get in touch with him myself. I've rung the front doorbell, and got my marching orders. What's he afraid of, I wonder? The place looked like a small fortress — a dozen men at work setting burglary alarms — and you're right about those footmen — bruisers every one of them, I should think."

Lady Agatha sighed deeply.

"Oh, I do hope," she exclaimed, "that David isn't going to do anything more that is likely to disgrace the family."

"I shouldn't worry," the Marquis reassured her. "David's got his head screwed on all right, but I fancy he

has a bee in his bonnet just now about something or other. Better let him go his own way and hope for the best. He was always a bit of a vagabond, but he was never a fool, and never anything but a good sort, if he had been treated properly."

"But, my dear, my dear Lord Glendower," Lady Agatha protested, "think! David is now the head of our family. He occupies a position which reflects upon all of us. How can we sit still quietly and wait until the morning papers spring some amazing piece of sensationalism upon us? What can David be doing? Is he keeping in touch with his old terrible associates? Is he afraid of the police? Is he still burgling houses, stealing diamonds? Is he fighting policemen? We must see him. Matthew must be given an opportunity of talking to him. He must be made to understand how terrible all this publicity is for us."

The Marquis dangled his eyeglass by its cord.

"Well, you see him, my dear lady," he advised. "You're his sister. With perseverance you may get in. I can't. I've even written him, and had no reply. I'm leaving him to himself now. The only thing was that, seeing you," he concluded, rising to his feet, "I thought you might have some later information which I should have been glad to share."

"You can't help us!" she pleaded.

"How the mischief can I?" he rejoined. "He's your brother. If you can get hold of him, he may tell you what he's up to. I'm jolly sure he doesn't mean to tell me."

"There have been several paragraphs in the paper already," she lamented.

"I'm not at all surprised. I think he'll be the talk of London before he's finished. Anyway, *au revoir*, Lady Agatha. My respects to Sir Matthew."

"My dear Lord Glendower —"

But the Marquis had eelish qualities and a deaf left ear, so he escaped.

Tottie Green was also receiving on the same evening, at about the same hour. The stairs which led to his apartment were neither of marble nor of polished oak, and a potman in shirt sleeves instead of a powdered flunkey waited to pass in the guests. One by one, in more or less furtive fashion, they slunk into the nauseous apartment, with its stale odours of beer and tobacco smoke. They seated themselves upon the stained plush chairs, and gathered round the bottle-laden table, for if Tottie Green had his faults, he was at least hospitable. There was Cannon Ball Lem, gloomy, a little drunk, yet sober enough for the work of the evening. There was an evil-looking youth by his side, Fred by name, promoted to this exclusive company for the first time, a youth with a white, snarling face, one shoulder higher than the other, a mouth which was like the slowly opening jaws of a poisonous snake. By his side sat Slimy Cotten, an ex-lawyer's clerk, dressed in sombre black, with clean linen collar and a wisp of black tie, his clawing fingers stretched upon the table. Opposite was Mike Hannen, the Irishman, a deadly gunman who had served his apprenticeship in Chicago, most silent always of the group, but the hero of many terrible fights, and with notches on his gun which, had they been understood, would have brought him swiftly to the gallows. With notebook, several pencils, and a map stretched out in front of him, Dick Ebben, still pallid from the terrors of his recent escape, haunted by the ghost of an evil knowledge, sat in a purposely chosen seat, with his back towards Tottie Green. Facing him, Belle, in flaming crimson velvet, lounged upon her couch, one gartered knee carelessly exposed, a cloud of cigarette smoke around her head. Tottie

Green remained in his easy-chair, a little away from the table, still in the same horrible clothes, still with his waistcoat unbuttoned, still with a flush on his face, and frequent spells of heavy breathing. He wiped his bulbous eyes with the remains of a handkerchief.

"No use fretting," he said at last. "It's five months since we lost one of the flock. There's nothing we can do. We can't pull down the prison, and we can't bribe the jury. Who's this?"

Reuben entered, a little breathlessly. He slid into a place as near Belle as possible.

"My apologies," he murmured. "I've been down to Bucklersbury to have one last word with Lawyer Franks. Four years, he says, is the minimum. Do you hear that, Dick? You were well out of it."

"I can't even now understand," Belle drawled, "how Dick got away. He admits he was knocked out. A pretty punch, I should think, David's, when he's in form."

Ebben lifted his head from the papers and looked at them, white-faced, that haunted look of fear always lingering in his eyes.

"I have told you how I got away from them," he muttered. "It was as dark as pitch, until the cops came with their electric torches. I crawled within half a yard of where Tommy Mason was lying, and I got into the churchyard. I was there till it was daylight. Blowed if there weren't cops and sergeants up and down that entry every few minutes. Anyway, I lay snug till it was all over. Then I picked up a taxi. Seems to me some of you chaps," he ended in a disgruntled fashion, "have got the wind up with me, because I wasn't copped with Tommy and Alf."

Tottie Green looked across at him thoughtfully, and when Tottie Green was thoughtful, his face was more than ever like a toad's.

"You ain't the man, Dick, I should have thought would have got out of a mess like that," he confided. "That hiding between tombstones don't seem to go quite natural with me. Several hours of it you must have had, and you're a scarey person."

Dick Ebben shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I got away, and that's all there is to it," he said curtly. "I can't do more than tell you what I have told you. We've got things to plan, ain't we? Why not get at it? You told me to bring along Fred here, and I've brought him. He ain't much to look at, perhaps, but he's the lad you want for the job. He's willing to take it on. Talk to him yourself, Daddy Green."

The old man scowled across the table, sipped noisily at his glass, and put it down empty. He pointed his pudgy forefinger across the room towards the dehumanised youth who was sitting opposite.

"Listen," he wheezed. "You ain't afraid? You ain't afraid to stick a knife into a man's gizzard, to take his life, mind, put his light out, take your risk of lying in the swinging room, waiting till you hear the tap, tap, tap in the morning when they build the gallows? You ain't afraid, eh?'

The youth moistened his lips. It was almost as though he found joy in Tottie Green's picture horrors.

"I ain't afraid of that," he boasted. "I've used the knife a bit, as Dick and Lem here can tell you, but I've never had a chance to strike right home. I tell you I'd like to kill a man, stick it right into him, take the blade out, and stab again."

"You know what it would mean if you were caught?" Tottie Green persisted.

The youth drew his foully dirty finger round his neck.

"I'd as soon go out that way as any other," he con-

fessed. "My, I'd be of some account for a few days, at any rate. How they'd sit in the Court and look at me! They'd wonder what I did it for, how I had the guts to strike. I'd have my picture in every paper. Fred, they'd have to call me. I ain't got any other name — Fred the Ripper. . . . I'll do it, Guv'nor. What do I touch if I get away? They may catch me later on, but I want a week to spend some money in somewhere, where there's whisky and hot fires, and girls, and plenty to eat too. Just a night or two like that. What do I get?"

"You get a hundred quid," Tottie Green announced slowly. "Twenty treasury notes before you leave this room, if you swear to do the job, and eighty afterwards."

"You won't have no trouble," Slimy Cotten confided. "We'll lead you to him. He's one of those brazen toffs who don't believe in danger. He won't know a thing about it until you've tickled him between the ribs."

"A hundred quid goes with me," the youth declared hoarsely. "You tip me up the twenty quid, Boss. Who's going to put me on to the job?"

"I will," Reuben volunteered.

"And when?"

"I'll let you know. Perhaps to-morrow evening; perhaps the day after. I'm not sure that I hadn't better put you on to it before you begin spending that twenty quid."

"You needn't worry," the young man sneered. "I don't get sodden boozed like some of you chaps. Whisky makes a man of me, makes the blood go hot. I tell you I'm on."

"That seems to be settled then," Tottie Green grunted, with a sigh of relief. "Know where he is to-night, Reube?"

"Not until I get the next call," the other replied. "There's two of them on his track. He ain't home yet. I can tell you that. When he's once inside that little house of his, he's best left alone. If I get the office, I'll take Fred along

to-night. If not, we'll track him out in the morning. He's down at Abbs's for an hour most evenings."

The girl swung herself around upon the couch, threw a smoked-out cigarette on to the hearth, pressed back her hair, and sat up.

"Silly lot of bunglers!" she mocked. "Seems to me you've all gone dotty lately. What's the sense in killing David Newberry?"

Tottie Green looked across the room at her in sullen anger.

"Your precious David's done it on us," he snarled, "and he's got to pay. If you want to save his life, get the Virgin's Tear out of him, or our share of it. You don't suppose we're going to sit still, and let him get away with that!"

"Why don't you give me a chance then?" she demanded. "What's the sense of hiring a little guttersnipe like this to do him in quick? Give me a chance, or get him into the Nursing Home."

Cannon Ball Lem half filled his glass with whisky and splashed in some soda water. He was a good deal more than half drunk already.

"What's Belle doing, always chipping in?" he muttered. "Whenever we make up our minds to treat the beast as he deserves, she's got a mouthful to say. Listen here, Belle, what do you want with Dave, eh? What's he to you?"

He staggered up — five feet eleven of mauled but still muscular savagery. She leaned towards him, her hands pressed against her hips. One could envisage the savage Frenchwoman spitting into the faces of the aristocrats as they passed.

"You cabbage-headed scum!" she shouted. "You, Lem, and every one of you. You're all mad with him because he's a toff, because he's class, and you ain't. You can get him stuck, all right, though there isn't one of you man

enough to stand up and do it fair. When you've put him out, what about the diamond? I've been wanting my share of that."

"A perfectly reasonable proposition," a cold and unexpected voice intervened from behind the screen which shielded the door. "There's something inartistic, not to say absolutely vicious, in these frantic attempts to get rid of me."

They started blankly towards the place from which the voice had come. With the crook of his stick hanging upon his arm, slowly withdrawing his gloves, a flower in the buttonhole of his overcoat, underneath which his evening clothes were visible, David Newberry stepped lightly into the room. He removed his hat from his head and his cigarette from his mouth.

"If I interrupted you, Miss Belle," he said, "I am sorry. I gather that from motives of policy, you were objecting to my premature assassination at the hands of one of these amiable gentlemen. I owe you my best thanks. Perhaps I may be permitted to join in the argument."

## CHAPTER XIII

It was Belle who first broke the silence with definite words. She leaned forward, and there was more than a glint of admiration in her eyes.

"Well, you've got a nerve!" she exclaimed.

Reuben moved his chair a little back so as to get between David and the door. The youth who called himself Fred the Ripper sat with his hands caressing his trousers pockets and his eyes fixed hungrily upon Tottie Green. He was waiting for a sign.

"Not much of a nerve," David answered cheerfully. "I haven't been a Lamb for nothing, you see. I know that there is no place in London where even an enemy is so safe as in this particular sitting room. God knows why my late Chief cherishes the place so much," David went on, looking around critically. "As I have taken the liberty of mentioning once or twice before, it's about the filthiest hole I've ever been in, but I do know that no tricks are allowed here, especially as I happen to have made the usual arrangements for my safe return."

From behind the shelter of his yellow-stained fingers, Fred the Ripper murmured into Cannon Ball Lem's ear.

"Can you find me a get-away, Lem? I'll give it to him now, right and good. I'll make as though I was going out, and turn upon him sudden."

Cannon Ball Lem sighed, with deep and genuine regret.

"Guv'nor won't have it, Fred," he confided. "He'll pop the whole show sometime, hanging on to this place."

On this occasion, however, it seemed that Lem was mistaken, and David had made a miscalculation. In a

wheezy voice from the chair, hoarse and vicious with agitation, with a hideous gesture, weak bloodshot eyes spelling death, Tottie Green, the human monster, his dirty, stubby forefinger pointing at Fred, broke the convention of twenty years.

"We'll see to you, lad," he croaked. "Blast the chauffeur, and to hell with the stiff! We'll get you away. Put him out!"

David was over-full of courage, but he had never been off his guard. Simultaneously with his leap backwards towards the door, he tripped Reuben and threw him. There was a whistling through the air, and a knife buried itself in the panels of the door a few inches above his lowered head. Tottie Green was struggling to turn round in his chair, something very ugly and very ominous gripped in the fat fingers of his right hand. The girl's voice rang out just as Fred was reaching for his second knife.

"Let him go, you fool!" she cried passionately. "You can get him any time you want. You'll smash up the whole show if you have the police in on this. Let him go, do you hear!"

Tottie Green's finger lingered lovingly upon the trigger of his automatic, even after David had swung open the door. Fred was creeping along by the side of the wall, his second knife in his hand, but David had no idea of loitering. He slammed the door and sped hotfoot down the stairs. From the shelter of his car, he leaned out of the window and looked upward. Tottie Green was gazing down at him from between the parted curtains. Behind his chair stood Belle. David lifted his hat, and she threw him a kiss. The car rolled off into the traffic.

Number 17a John Street, David's temporary abode, had been converted into a veritable stronghold. There were three footmen installed, utterly untrained in their pro-

fession, but each in his turn a daily performer at Abbs' Gymnasium for physical exercises. The most perfect system of burglar alarms was in full working order. Dowson's instructions allowed him not the slightest latitude. The doors were closed against even members of the family. The Marquis of Glendower himself had been refused admittance. It was rather a shock, therefore, to David, after having let himself in with his latchkey, and having taken note of the servant on guard in his chair at the lower end of the hall, to enter his library and find a stranger seated in his favourite corner. It was a still greater surprise when the visitor, lowering the newspaper which she had been reading, at the sound of his entrance, revealed herself as an exceedingly attractive young woman with pale yellow hair, deep blue eyes, a delightful mouth, a thin but elegant body, and a shameful display of silken-clad legs.

"Who the mischief are you, and what are you doing here?" he demanded.

She looked him over with keen but kindly interest. There was a puzzled gleam of anticipatory recognition in her eyes as they met his. She threw away the newspaper and sat up in her chair.

"Really," she protested, "you ought not to have to ask such questions. You should keep some account of your connections. My poor dear step-aunt has been here, and goes about telling everybody that she was disgracefully treated. That great man, the Napoleon of finance, as the *Morning Post* calls him, Sir Matthew, was also turned away from your door. I made up my mind that the duty of welcoming you back into the family had devolved upon me."

"Do you mind telling me who you are and how you got in?" he begged.

"I'll tell you who I am, if you like, although you ought

to know without being told," she agreed, "but never how I got in. I — "

She broke off without finishing her sentence. Her eyes seemed to get larger and rounder.

"Please stay exactly in that position!" she gasped. "Yes! I was praying that you might be — and you are. You are my burglar!"

"Isn't this rather a one-sided sort of performance?" David suggested good-humouredly. "It seems to me that you are having all the fun."

She shook her finger at him.

"Don't you remember," she asked, with impressive emphasis, "on the last night of your degenerate days — in the days, I mean, when you belonged to the criminal classes — poring over a small casket in Lady Frankley's bedroom — where you hadn't the slightest right in the world, you know — finding that great diamond — looking up and suddenly seeing me?"

"My God!" he exclaimed. "You were the girl in the blue pyjamas."

She smiled, and her tone became more conversational.

"I am glad you noticed them," she murmured. "I'm old-fashioned enough not to be terribly fond of pyjamas, but I do think those particular ones are becoming, and when you're staying in a house where there's likely to be a fire or a burglary, they certainly are — useful. I should never have had the courage, in a nightgown, to stand there and look at you."

"Will you tell me this," he insisted, looking at her with a questioning light in his eyes. "When you saw me, you say that I had that diamond in my hand — the Virgin's Tear, they call it."

"You certainly had," she assured him. "It looked like the drop piece of a chandelier."

"Well, then, perhaps you can remember something else," he went on. "Directly I saw you, I made a bolt for it. What did I do with the diamond?"

"Don't be silly," she rejoined. "You took it away with you, of course. It was never recovered either, and Lady Frankley has had the insurance on it."

"I took it away with me!" he repeated.

She nodded.

"Haven't you got it now?" she enquired, with a little frown of disappointment. "I was hoping that it had come into the family for good."

He remained silent for a moment, looking into vacancy with the air of one trying to link up a broken chain. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he seemed to dismiss the matter from his mind.

"Please tell me exactly who you are," he begged, "and how you came to be there that night?"

"I'll tell you all about myself with pleasure," she agreed, "but what about a cigarette, and is it too early for a cocktail? You see, I daren't ring the bell, because I knew that old Dowson would turn me out. You don't mind my being here, do you?" she added, glancing at him with a distracting smile. "I made up my mind that I had to see the villain of the family somehow."

David, who had been perfectly at his ease half an hour before with the muzzle of a revolver creeping into line with his chest, and a knife quivering in the woodwork a few inches away from his head, in the presence of this harmless but astonishing visitor, with her amazing smile, felt himself singularly embarrassed. Nevertheless, he rang the bell.

"Anything you like, of course," he assented, "but, excuse me, aren't you a little young for cocktails?"

She laughed at him compassionately.

"As a matter of fact," she confessed, "I'm rather outliving my flapperdom. I was told only the other day, quite seriously, that I was getting *passée*, and I know that mother is becoming worried because I haven't been seriously engaged more than twice. However, for your peace of mind, let me assure you that before many weeks are passed I shall be twenty-one."

Dowson entered the room, and, notwithstanding his training, he started when he saw the girl.

"Miss Sophy!" he exclaimed. "However did you — I beg your pardon, my lord — I can't imagine how the young lady got here."

"Neither can I," David rejoined drily, "but there she is. You'll have to put your staff through it, Dowson. Send in some tea, cocktails and cigarettes."

"China tea for me, please," the girl begged. "I'll put off the cocktail until just before I go — unless you want to get rid of me at once."

"Not at all," David assured her. "Since you are here, you are very welcome indeed. What I am still puzzling about is how you got in."

"I can answer for one thing, my lord," Dowson declared earnestly, "the young lady didn't come in by the front way or through the window. I haven't been off duty for a minute, and there have been two men in the hall."

David looked at her enquiringly.

"As soon as Dowson has gone," she promised, "I'll tell you the truth."

David dismissed the man with a little nod.

"Well, I shall hold you to your word, young woman," he warned her, coming back to the hearthrug. "I want to know exactly how you got here. I have rather particular reasons for cutting myself off from visitors just now. I seem to have taken every precaution, and it's a little de-

pressing to find that you should have broken through the lines so easily."

"Listen," she pleaded, jumping up and gently propelling him towards her chair, "I know I have your favourite place, because your pipe and tobacco are on the table by the side of it. Please sit down and make yourself quite comfortable, and when you are sure that you are not going to scold any one I'll reveal the whole terrible secret to you."

He accepted the situation good-humouredly. She seated herself on the arm of his chair.

"No one else in the world," she confided, "could have got in just in the way I did. Don't worry about it, please, and don't think that there's any one else to blame, because there isn't, and Dowson's quite right. I never came near the front door."

"Very well then," he conceded, "we'll exonerate Dowson. There still remains the question, though, of how you did get in."

"Quite simply, after all," she assured him. "I was passing here — we live a few doors away, just in Curzon Street, you know — when I saw a maid who used to be with us go down your area steps. I talked to her for some time, and she was naturally interested, because all her family are with us in one capacity or another, and whilst we were there, the teabell rang, and all your people marched into the servants' hall. It was then that the idea came to me of invading your Highness' solitude. Anna was rather hard to persuade, but she gave way at last. She took me up the back stairs and let me in here."

"Sounds simple," David admitted. "But now that you are here, do you mind telling me what you came for?"

"To see you," she acknowledged. "To pay you a friendly visit. I think it's so delightful to have an ex-burglar in the

family. I'm tired of all my relatives, and I thought that you might be a pleasant change."

"But am I a relative?" he queried. "We are rather a muddled-up family, you know."

"Well, at any rate, you're a connection," she declared. "That's almost the same thing. To be genealogical, one of your twin brothers — Harold, his name was, the one with the squint — married a widow, my mother. Your brother, you see, became my stepfather. The Prayer Book might take no account of it, but I shall claim you as a cousin. Are those cigarettes on the table there?"

David passed her a box, and she lit one with a little murmur of satisfaction.

"How scared you were of me that night," she observed reminiscently. "You took one look, and off you went like a streak."

"It is an axiom of my profession," he told her, "to retire as the enemy approaches."

"On the whole," she went on, "I think I'm rather glad you didn't get away. For one thing, it is so fascinating to think that you have actually been in prison, and, for another, I shouldn't have seen that fight. Fancy taking two policemen on like that! I was proud to think that you were in the family."

David chuckled.

"It was rather they who took me on," he remarked. "By-the-by, young woman, where were you brought up?"

"Don't call me 'young woman,' " she expostulated. "My name is Sophy, and yours is David. That's quite enough. As to my upbringing, it was bad," she confessed with a sigh. "I went to the usual sort of school in Queensgate, Paris for a year, and six months down at Tours to perfect my French. Of course I learnt nothing, but then no girl nowadays ever does until after she's left school."

"You're coming along pretty well now, I should think," he remarked, smiling.

"Don't you like me?" she asked, with a slight uplifting of the eyebrows. "You seem very critical."

"I find you perfectly delightful," he acknowledged; "just a little over-lenient to the criminal classes, perhaps."

"If you're a fair sample of them," she confided, "I think I should like to belong. Couldn't I be an adventuress or something. . . . You did knock one of those policemen out magnificently, David. I was praying that you'd get away."

"I had hopes myself," he regretted. "The locked door did me."

She looked round the room inquisitively.

"May I ask you one question?"

"Oh, any number."

"Well, let's make it two, then. First of all, why are you living here in this state of siege?"

Dowson entered the room, carrying a tea tray, followed by one of the clumsy footmen, wheeling a small table. Sophy did the honours sedately and bit into an almond cake.

"And furthermore," she continued, as soon as the door was closed, "why are you waited upon by an untrained footman who looks like a prize fighter?"

"He is a prize fighter," David replied, "and rather a good one at that. He's here as a sort of chucker-out in case he's wanted. To tell you the truth, I'm at loggerheads with the gang to which I belonged when that burglary was planned."

"How exciting!" she murmured. "Tell me about it."

"Well, I consider that they treated me shockingly," he confided. "There was plenty of time for us all to have got away, but in order to gain a little extra for themselves, they locked the corridor door."

"Dirty skunks!" the girl exclaimed.

"For that reason," David continued, "before I settle down to a quiet life, I am proposing to get some of my own back again. They know it, and to cut a long matter short, we're at war."

She was puzzled.

"But you can't do anything against them except through the police."

"I don't want to bring the police into it," he replied. "I have reasons for that which we won't worry about just now. I would rather give them a pounding outside, and have people suppose that it was just a war between two gangs. That's why I'm training a certain number of young men — my footmen are three of them — at a gymnasium. Meanwhile, my idea is to get information as to where their next raid is to be, bring my fellows along, and queer the pitch for them. Later on, we shall probably organise something in the nature of a battle royal. The two fellows who let me down particularly are going to get the lesson of their lives."

"What a sporting effort," she approved. "Couldn't I join up with you, David? I might be your secretary."

David smiled.

"Well, we're not sending out typewritten notices, or anything of that sort yet," he told her. "All the same, I think they're getting the wind up a little. I went down to headquarters to have a word with the Chief this afternoon, thinking I should be perfectly safe, for I know they want to keep their headquarters quiet, but they had a go for me. I only just got away. . . . There, now, I've answered one of your questions — pretty fully too. What's the other?"

"What did you do with the Blue Diamond? You left the room with it, because I saw it in your hand when you turned to run. Yet it was never found on you or anywhere. The insurance company have paid Lady Frankley for it."

"Wicked old lady!" David murmured.

Sophy sat up in her chair.

"Do you mean to say that she has drawn the insurance money and has the diamond all the time?" she demanded.

"No, I wouldn't say that," David remonstrated. "She is either wicked or stupid."

"You hid the diamond, and think she ought to have found it!" the girl declared breathlessly.

"Amazing!" he exclaimed. "No wonder you've managed to get along without any education, my child. You have intuition; that's far more important."

"Yes, but remember this," she pointed out. "I was the only one who saw you get away with it. When it wasn't found upon you, they all concluded that one of the others had it."

"Why didn't you tell them the truth?" he asked. "Your evidence would have been valuable."

For the first time during her somewhat unusual visit, the girl showed signs of embarrassment. She dealt with the question frankly enough, however.

"I didn't say a word to any one about it," she confided, "because I knew that if I did I should have to go into court, and if I were questioned — well, wouldn't you have had a much heavier sentence if I'd said that I knew you took the diamond?"

He looked at her with slightly rising colour — more than a little impressed.

"Sophy!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that this is why you've said nothing about it all this time?"

She met his eager gaze composedly enough, but there was an unaccustomed tremor in her voice as she answered.

"Yes, that's the reason," she acknowledged. "Stupid, wasn't it, but I rather liked the look of you, and you fought so awfully well when you were caught in a trap. I didn't

care a hang about Lady Frankley or the diamond, and I didn't see why I should interfere and make it harder for you."

"What a little brick!" he declared. "You probably saved me a couple of years."

"You had better devote them to my service then," she laughed. "You can teach me the ethics of burglary, and — well, there's one thing you can do at once — curiosity has been gnawing at my inside ever since that night. Tell me what you did with that diamond?"

He rose to his feet, and, standing close to her, took a cigarette from a box and lit it.

"That's the question the gang are asking me all the time," he said quietly. "That's the second cause of feud between us. Now, I've never answered their questions, but I'm going to tell you the truth. I don't know."

## CHAPTER XIV

She looked up at him blankly.

"Am I stupid?" she asked. "I don't understand."

"Well, it does sound pretty amazing, doesn't it?" he acknowledged. "But that is the simple truth of the whole matter. I had the diamond in my hand when I ran, right enough, and when I recovered consciousness in hospital four days later, one of the first things I tried to remember was what I had done with it. I couldn't remember; I never have remembered. All that I know is that at the back of my mind there remains to this minute a conviction that somewhere between the door of the bedroom and the locked door, which was where I was trapped, I got rid of it. That was what I meant when I said that Lady Frankley was stupid. It doesn't seem to me possible that there could have been a hiding place in the one room between those two doors where I could have secreted the diamond and she could have failed to find it. I've tried time after time to think what I did with it," he went on, "but concussion is a curious thing. People sometimes lose their memory altogether afterwards, you know, and certainly a few seconds of that evening have clean gone from me. I not only can't remember what I did with the diamond, but I can't remember what the room looked like through which I passed. I couldn't tell you whether there were windows, ornaments, or whether it was merely a passage. The last thing I remember on that night was you in your blue pyjamas."

There was a brief silence. He looked at her anxiously.

A very disconcerting idea was suddenly troubling him.

"I say, you do believe me?" he begged. "You don't think that I'm making it up, that I want the beastly diamond?"

She caught at his hand and laughed up at him.

"You silly man!" she exclaimed. "Of course I never had such an idea. I am sure that every word you told me is the truth. I will tell you what I was thinking, if you like: that the diamond's somewhere in one of those two rooms, and I was thinking what a gorgeous treasure hunt it would make to go down and look for it. I shall be there too, on Tuesday."

"It might be quite worth while," he agreed. "You're not short of pocket money, by any chance? There's a five-thousand-pound reward offered by the Insurance Company for the return of the Virgin's Tear."

"Short of pocket money!" she screamed. "Five thousand pounds! David! My allowance is five hundred a year, and I have to pay for my own taxis, clothes, and bridge debts. Five thousand pounds! Who has to pay it, David?"

"The Insurance Company," he told her. "Nobody that matters."

The lipstick which she had drawn from her vanity case a moment or two before slipped from her fingers, and she forgot to pick it up. Her eyes danced with excitement.

"Five thousand pounds!" she repeated. "Why, I could buy a two-seater. Oh, how I've ached to have a little car of my own. Think of the frocks I could get!"

"That's all very well," he warned her, "but you haven't found the diamond yet, and I'm afraid I can't help you about it."

"I'll find it all right," she declared confidently. "But listen, David. If I do, the reward will belong to you, surely?"

"Not a penny of it," was the indignant retort. "If I were to produce the thing now, they would simply think I knew where it had been all the time. They wouldn't believe my story of having forgotten. I'm not sure that my claiming the reward wouldn't be conspiracy. In any case, not one penny of it could ever come into my pocket. It has to be found casually by you. You've always had an idea, remember, that I was carrying the diamond when you saw me, and you thought you'd look round to see if there was any place where I could have hidden it. Suppose you come across the diamond, as I hope you may, it's a perfectly genuine find, and you'll get the reward all right. Every one will be better off. The Insurance Company will pay out five thousand pounds and get back the fifty thousand pounds they paid to Lady Frankley. Lady Frankley will have her diamond back again, and, so far as I can see, every one will be happy. The only silly part of the whole arrangement is that I can't tell you where to go and retrieve the thing."

"Don't you bother," she enjoined. "I'll find it."

Dowson made his appearance with the cocktails. Sophy sipped hers appreciatively.

"This has been fun," she said. "You're not sorry I paid my duty call, are you, David?"

"My dear, of course not," he assured her, "as long as you don't get into trouble with your people."

"Trouble!" she scoffed. "The only trouble I might get into would be with Lady Kendrig. She'd think I'd stolen a march on her and Clarence. They all pretend to think that you're such a black sheep, you know, David, and all the time they're just dying to get around you for one thing or another. Lady Kendrig wants to live at Newberry. Perfectly crazy about it. Wants to see Clarence installed there. I wonder if you'll ever marry, David?"

"I wonder," he murmured.

"Awful blow to them if you did," she reflected. "They've all got that sickly kid on the brain. David, I'm too excited to talk coherently. I shall go down to Frankley to-morrow, I think. Can I come and see you and tell you all about it?"

"You can come whenever you like," he promised. "I'll let Dowson know that you are free of the place."

She finished her second cocktail reluctantly and rose to her feet.

"I suppose I must go. I hate to, though. You'll find this will be quite my favourite bar for an *apéritif*."

"You'll be welcome whenever I'm here. Dowson will always tell you the truth."

She linked her arm through his, and they made their way slowly to the door.

"You'll take me out now and then, won't you, David?"

"I'm not at all sure that you'd be allowed to come," he warned her.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"We don't live like that nowadays!"

Dowson met them at the door. For some reason or other, David was half sorry and half relieved to see him.

"This young lady, Dowson," he directed, "has the *entrée* of the house. She can come whenever she chooses, whether I'm here or not."

"Very good, my lord," was the expressionless reply.

David handed her over and listened to her light laugh as she passed down the hall. Then he closed the door, and, moving over to his desk, opened a letter, the outside of which at least was intriguing. It was a large, square, mauve envelope, addressed to him in ill-formed, sprawling handwriting, which still possessed a certain character. Even as he drew out the contents, a wave of inspiration told him from whom this communication came. A faint but pungent odour seemed to cling to his fingers:

Dave, you must keep away from here. This is serious. They mean having you, and Tottie Green is the worst of them all. He has never yet allowed a blow to be struck in his apartments. To-day he would have taken the risk. He'd have had you killed if you hadn't been so quick. Why do you come? You can't do any good. Why is it? Sheer bravado? Well, you've done it often enough. Let them think you have the diamond. They'll keep you alive then.

I don't know why I'm writing to warn you. I suppose I should get it myself if they knew — but there it is! Don't come near here again. At any hour of the morning, afternoon or night, you would be in danger of your life.

BELLE

P. S. I wouldn't mind meeting you anywhere else!

David laughed softly to himself as he tore up the letter.

"I rather believe that you're right, my beautiful Juno," he murmured, as he watched the blazing fragments.

## CHAPTER XV

David had taken the last sip of his final whisky and soda and knocked out the remains of his pipe into the ash tray. It was striking twelve o'clock, and he was no lover of late hours. The doors of the house were barred and bolted, the burglar alarms set. He rose to his feet with a yawn. As he crossed the room, the telephone bell ran. . . .

Afterwards he asked himself whether there was any possible way in which he could account for the thrill which shot through him at the familiar sound, at the haste with which he snatched at the receiver, at the eagerness with which he spoke into the tube. Dead thing though it was, there had been something sinister, alarming in its staccato summons.

"Hullo!" he called out.

He recognised at once the answering voice, racked and broken though it was with pain.

"Mr. Newberry, for the love of heaven — the gym. . . . Quick! They've got me — Dick Ebben too. . . . Oh, my God!"

There was silence. The communication had been cut off. David did not hesitate for a moment. He hurried into a long, thick overcoat, filled an automatic pistol from a drawer of his bureau, and made his way out to the hall. Fortunately, the last few days had been days of caution. He did nothing blindly. He remembered Dowson's warning, repeated several times lately, that an unsavoury-looking little stranger had been haunting the area steps. He pulled

back the spring lock, opened the front door slowly inch by inch, his body tense, ready for any form of attack. He had scarcely reached the steps before it came. From some secret lurking place, David was conscious of the batlike dart of a small doubled-up human being, and in the light from the electric standard caught the flash of that thin, uplifted ripple of steel. There was a shriek of pain as the knife shot up into the air, to descend clattering into the area. The other hand, with its skinny, yellow-stained fingers was caught and bent backwards. Even then the would-be murderer had one trick left. He bit viciously at David's hand, his yellow teeth like the fangs of a wild animal, the savagery of the human beast rampant. One glimpse of his expression, and any gleam of pity David might have felt faded away. He was dealing with a mad creature, crazy with the lust to kill. There was no one in sight for the moment. David tensed his muscles, lifted his unwholesome burden as high as his head, and sent it hurtling over into the area after the knife. He fell there with a dull thud. There was not even a moan of pain. Without a glance downwards, David crossed the street, found the driver of a first taxi stand, and showed him a pound note.

"Corner of Swan's Alley, High Street, Holborn," he directed. "Drive like hell."

They sped away through the still crowded streets. David glanced at his automatic, tested the loading carefully, and thrust it back into his pocket. The call which he had received might have been a faked one to induce him to leave the house with Fred the Ripper there in waiting. On the other hand, the voice had been uncommonly like Sam West's, and the gymnasium after hours was his arranged meeting place with Ebben. . . . In the Strand they were checked, but along Aldwych they were again in full speed. The man had earned his money when they drew up at the

corner of Swan Alley, and David pressed the note into his hand.

"You can wait if you like," he enjoined. "I am coming back presently."

He hurried along the narrow way, passed the silent warehouses and the gloomy churchyard opposite, to where at the end appeared the carved sign of Abbs's Gymnasium. There were no lights burning, no sign of any disturbance. Everything was perfectly quiet, yet David, even after he had inserted the key in the lock, stood for fully half a minute listening. Finally he opened the door, stepped very slowly across the threshold, and flashed the electric torch he was carrying into the long room, partially visible already from the light shining in from outside, grey and ghostly in its bareness, mysterious where the gymnastic apparatus, partially swathed in dust sheets, was faintly defined in a pool of blackness. He moved to the wall and switched on the electric light. As soon as he had done so, he knew that something was wrong. The office door was half open, and a pane of glass was broken. Warily, and with an ever-growing sense of apprehension, he crossed the floor and turned on the switch which illuminated the office. A little groan escaped his lips as the light flared out. Ebben lay doubled up on the floor, the back of his head smashed in as though by one tremendous blow. Almost by his side, Sam West was lying with a knife in his chest, and blood slowly oozing through his garments to the floor. In the background were two easy-chairs drawn together, and on the table an open box of cigars, two glasses, and a partially filled bottle of whisky. The scene almost reconstructed itself: Ebben, a little nervous but avaricious, bargaining as to the value of the information he had brought; Sam West only anxious to do his master's bidding. The lights in the outside warehouse had probably been unlit. The assassins

had stolen through the darkness to the very threshold of the office before they had launched their attack. David shivered as he pulled the door to and closed it. . . .

Once more in the warehouse, for several seconds he stood intensely on the *qui vive*. There had been many small indications that the terrible deed, the result of which he had just witnessed, had been committed during the last few minutes. If so, how had the murderer or murderers escaped? The door had been properly locked, he had encountered no one in the alley, no one lurking in the dark corners. Even with the electric lights commanding it, there were plenty of hiding places in the long corridor below. He stood peering intently into the carpet of gloom. To have used his electric torch would have helped him little and would have invited trouble. Trusting instead to his hearing, which was remarkably acute, more than once it struck him that he heard a faint, stealthy movement as of some one dragging himself along the floor. He crept nearer and nearer to the opposite wall and peered down the long line of windows. Almost instantly he realised that one near the bottom end was being softly opened. With the slow, upraising of the sash, he began to hear faintly the sounds of the traffic in Holborn. He stole a little lower down the wall. The darkness was still almost impenetrable, but there was a slightly greyer shade about the window he suspected. He watched, almost holding his breath. Presently grey became black, still leaving chinks of the lighter colour. Then loomed into sight the outline of a human form trying to get through the window. David drew his automatic and hesitated. Even at his present range, a touch upon the trigger might spell death. Then he thought of the two men in the office behind, and he hesitated no longer. The report sounded like the discharge of a cannon under the narrow, vaulted roof. He pulled the trigger once again and dropped on to his

stomach. A stab of flame flashed through the gloom. Spit came the bullets upon the wall behind him — two, three four. He let out a cry of agony as though wounded. There was a chuckle from below, the disappearance of the dark mass of obscurity, and then silence. David leaped to his feet and crossed to the outside door. He was in the alley within a dozen seconds, but the place was empty. He sped down it, passing the open window, hastening towards the main thoroughfare. The man whom he was stalking had passed out amongst the multitude. He hesitated upon the pavement as to which way to turn. . . . A heavy hand descended upon his shoulder. A sergeant of police was standing by his side with a constable in reserve. The former's tone was moderately polite but firm, and his right hand continued to rest upon David's shoulder.

"May I ask what you are doing out in this street, sir, with an automatic pistol — which has apparently," the man added, stooping down and sniffing, "been recently discharged?"

"Chasing a murderer," was the grim reply. "He must have been within a foot of you."

## CHAPTER XVI

The three men, David closely escorted in the middle, started up the alley. Almost immediately, they were overtaken by a small man in plain clothes, whom the sergeant saluted respectfully.

"What's wrong, Sergeant?" the newcomer asked.

"We just saw this gentleman hurrying down the alley with the gun in his hand which Cookton is carrying, sir," the sergeant replied. "Two barrels had been discharged recently. According to him, there's been some trouble at Abbs's Gymnasium."

"Abbs's Gymnasium?" the other repeated. "Surely that doesn't keep open till this time of the night?"

"Not in an ordinary way," David explained. "The place happens to belong to me. My manager was there late — had some business with a friend. I got a telephone message that something was wrong, and I hurried down."

"And your name, sir?"

"David Newberry — Lord Newberry, to be precise. Number 17a John Street, my address."

"I am Detective Inspector Milsom of Scotland Yard," the man in plain clothes confided. "I thought I heard some shooting, and I slipped out of my taxi to see what was going on. The sergeant says that he has an automatic of yours, of which two barrels have been recently discharged."

David nodded.

"I don't know exactly how the law looks at these things," he admitted, "but after having seen the bodies of two men

who had been brutally murdered, I had two or three shots at a man I couldn't possibly have captured, getting out of a window. He had three or four back at me. You'll be able to see the marks on the wall."

The detective made no comment. Under the light of the electric standard, he disclosed himself as a small, sandy-haired man, with a freckled complexion and turned-up nose, very unimposing in his plain business suit of dark grey. They paused outside the academy. David opened the door with his latchkey.

"Is this where the murder was committed?" the detective asked.

"In the office here," David replied.

"I see that you have a latchkey to the place."

"As I told you just now, I am the proprietor of the establishment," David explained. "I bought it from Mr. Abbs some weeks ago."

He led the way to the office and turned on the light. The three men gave vent to a simultaneous exclamation of horror.

"This is what I saw when I arrived about a quarter of an hour ago," David said.

"You haven't disturbed anything in the office, sir?"

"Not a thing."

The detective turned to his two companions.

"Constable," he directed, "telephone to Holborn Police Station for our own doctor and ambulances. Now, if you don't mind, sir," he added, turning to David, "I should like to hear your story."

"Hadn't we better examine the bodies first, sir?" the sergeant suggested.

The other shook his head.

"There is no hurry about that," he decided. "Both men are evidently dead. Now then, if you please, sir."

"I'm afraid there isn't much that I can tell you," David said with regret. "I bought this gymnasium, as I have just told you, some weeks ago, from Abbs, the former proprietor, and poor Sam West there, the heavier of the two men, was my manager. Just as I was going to bed to-night, the telephone bell rang. West spoke to me in great agitation and gave me to understand that there was trouble here. I jumped into a taxi and hurried down. The door was locked, as usual, and there was no sign of any disturbance when I arrived."

The detective took the revolver which the sergeant was still carrying and glanced at it thoughtfully.

"This is your property, sir, is it not?"

"Certainly," David acknowledged. "At the same time, you will notice that one of these men was killed by a terrible blow from a jemmy, and the other stabbed with a knife. I will explain why I was carrying the pistol when I met the sergeant. It seemed to me that whoever had done this must have come in by one of the windows down towards the end of the corridor there. I made my way in that direction. If you will come with me, I should like to show you exactly where I stood."

David led them to the place where he had crouched against the wall and pointed to the opposite window.

"I got just about as far as here," he went on, "when I fancied I heard a little shuffling, as though some one were hiding. I was just going to call out when a man sprang on to the window sill here. I could never have caught him, so I fired at him. He was halfway through the window at the time, but he stopped long enough to have three or four shots at me. You can see the marks on the wall here. He disappeared then, and I followed him down the alley, letting myself out by the front door. He was out of sight, however, before I could even leave the place."

"Too dark for you to be able to identify him, I suppose?" the sergeant enquired.

"Absolutely," David regretted. "I could see nothing but a shape."

"Let's have a look at the window," the detective suggested.

They crossed the room. The window was still open, and the chair upon which the escaped man had mounted stood underneath it. Milsom climbed carefully to the sash and examined it with a small electric torch. Presently he slid back to the ground.

"I should like everything left just as it is down here," he begged. "Have you any idea whether you hit the man or not, sir?"

"Impossible to say. I thought he disappeared rather suddenly, but when I got to the front door, the alley was empty."

"Well, you hit him, all right," the detective confided drily. "There's blood on the sill here and some in the alley. Furthermore, as it happens, I saw him running down towards the street. He was staggering like a man who is in pain. By the time I had stopped my taxi and got out, though, he had disappeared."

There was a brief pause. The sergeant, who had taken copious notes, put away his book. The detective remained silent. The former had listened to the story with that non-committal air of suspicion cherished by his profession; the latter's expression had been imperturbable.

"We might have another look at the office," the detective proposed, leading the way.

They arrived there simultaneously with the appearance of the doctor, with whom Milsom shook hands.

"A bad business here, I am afraid," he remarked gravely, as he threw open the door. "Keep outside, please," he

added, waving back the sergeant and David. "We sha'n't be a minute."

The first examination of the bodies was grim but brief.

"A big job for one man," the detective reflected, as he brushed the dust from the knees of his trousers. "I should think there must have been two or three in it. Don't touch the door, please. Constable, will you telephone to the Yard and say that if there is no one on duty in the finger-print department they must send for Mr. Harrison. You know who these two men are, I suppose?" he enquired, turning to David. "One, I think you said, was your manager."

David nodded.

"Sam West — and the smaller one's name is Ebben."

"And your own name once more, sir, please?"

"David Newberry."

The detective moistened the point of the pencil which he had taken out of his notebook.

"David Newberry," he repeated reflectively.

"You ought to remember it. You arrived at Frankley Place, didn't you, just when the fun was on one night about twelve months ago. You saw me taken off to hospital, and you were in court when I was tried."

"Ah, yes, of course," the detective murmured, a little startled by the other's insouciance. "Some one told me that you'd come into a property or something of the sort. Rather a pity to get mixed up in an affair like this."

David raised his eyebrows.

"I'm not mixed up in it," he declared, "except that Sam West was my foreman here."

"What made you buy the gymnasium?"

"I may have to answer that question later on," was the cold reply. "At present I can't see that it's any one's business but my own."

"Quite right," the other approved. "It was merely a friendly question, sir — or rather, my lord, isn't it?"

"I'm forgetting that whenever I can," David observed curtly. "I should be glad if you'd do the same."

"Certainly, if you wish it. So the position is this. You're the owner of this establishment. Sam West is your manager. He rings you up — well, somewhere about midnight, it must have been. You don't remember exactly what he said, I suppose?"

"I do not. I simply understood that there were burglars in the place. Then his voice died away, and I gathered that he'd been attacked. I jumped into a taxi and came right along."

"Good! We've got the whole story now. Queer that you should have known the name of the other man."

"It's not queer at all," David contradicted. "He's one of the band of criminals I more or less belonged to until the Frankley Place affair."

"What do you suppose he was doing with your foreman here at that hour of the night? Looks like some sort of a secret conference, doesn't it?"

"No idea."

The detective thrust the tiny notebook in which he had been writing into his waistcoat pocket.

"Really no need for me to bother you with these questions," he apologised. "Simply a matter of curiosity, after all. We may have to ask you for a little further information later on — something that will help us to get at the motive for a brutal affair like this. We needn't detain you any longer, Lord Newberry. By-the-by, didn't you say that you lived on John Street?"

"Number 17a."

The detective stroked his chin.

"Strange thing," he confided. "There's been a little

trouble up that way to-night. A man found with a broken neck in either the area of your house or the next one. You wouldn't know anything about that, I suppose, sir?"

"Not a thing," David replied coolly. "I don't look down areas. Good night, Inspector. You'll find me at home most afternoons and evenings, if you want a chat at any time. I shall be here to-morrow morning to appoint some one to succeed poor West."

"We shall find you all right when we want you, I'm sure," Detective Milsom replied pleasantly. "Open the door for his lordship, Constable. Good night, Lord Newberry."

## CHAPTER XVII

It was quite a family conclave in the lounge of the Ritz before luncheon, a few days later, joined in, to some extent, by Glendower, although his presence was quite accidental. There was Sir Matthew Kendrig and Lady Agatha Kendrig — David's sister and her husband — Lady Anderleyton, his sister-in-law, and Sophy her daughter. They had been joined by Glendower, who listened a little grimly to Lady Agatha's agitated outpourings.

"I do think that the papers this morning are outrageous," she exclaimed. "The account of the inquest in the *Morning Post* was perfectly awful — the *Morning Post* too, from which you don't expect that sort of thing! It's on every placard along Piccadilly — 'Cross-Examination of Peer in Holborn Inquest.' As if David hadn't brought enough disgrace upon the family without plunging us into this!"

"I can't quite see that he's plunged you into anything," Glendower objected, with signs of growing irritation. "He chose to buy Abbs's Gymnasium and to appoint this poor fellow West as his manager. Why shouldn't he buy it if he wanted to? Abbs was an old retainer of the family, as you know. He was boxing instructor down at Anderleyton years ago. West is attacked at night by some one or other — we don't know whom — finds a chance to telephone to David, and does so. David does the natural thing, sets off at once, arrives at Swan Alley to find that a brutal murder has been committed, hunts for the murderer like the plucky fellow he is, has a shot at him, and gets three or four bullets within

a foot of his own head, according to the diagrams. Then he goes for the police, and that seems to be an end to his share in the matter, so far as I can see."

Lady Agatha's eyes were closed for a moment. Perhaps she was wondering why fate had not mercifully directed one of those bullets a foot to the left or to the right, and brought the great Newberry estates and title to a more fitting possessor.

"But that wasn't all, Marquis," Sir Matthew intervened ponderously. "In what I thought to be a most unnecessary fashion, they raked up David's past, they forced him to say that he recognised the other murdered man — Ebben, his name was — forced him to admit that he had been a member of the same gang of criminals. The whole thing was disgraceful."

"Every one is pitying us," Lady Agatha sighed.

"Well, sympathy's worth having, anyhow," Glendower observed, accepting a cocktail from the tray which was just being handed around. "I don't see what they've got to pity any of you for, though. It wasn't your fault that David went off the rails once. There is nothing in this affair to blame him for."

"But did you read the whole of the cross-examination?" Lady Anderleyton put in. "The coroner was most inquisitive. He evidently thought that there was some mysterious reason for David's having bought the gymnasium. Then they tried hard to drag in that other affair too — the young man who was found with his neck broken in the area of the house in John Street."

"Well, they didn't get much change out of David there," Glendower remarked good-humouredly. "The fellow was a well-known criminal, and he was out on a job of burglary. Two knives and an automatic are a pretty good outfit."

"We must admit, however," Sir Matthew pronounced,

"that the whole affair is exceedingly unfortunate. The coroner evidently had some idea at the back of his mind that David was taking an interest in his past associates, and I think that some of his questions were inexcusable. David's own conduct too, has been, I consider, most blameworthy. I believe you already know, Glendower, that he has refused to see either me or my wife — his own sister. He has barricaded himself up in that little house in John Street as though it were a fortress. What for? No one has any idea. Naturally it creates suspicion. These fellows get to know things, and, without a doubt, the coroner had been advised as to David's mode of life. Do you realise this, Marquis? Not one of the family has seen or been received by him since his — er — return into ordinary life."

Sophy closed her vanity case with a snap and leaned forward. Her manner was bland and her expression innocent. Nevertheless, she had the air of a young woman whose patience has broken down under a severe strain.

"Oh, yes, they have, if you reckon me in the family," she announced. "I've seen him. He received me, all right — seemed to rather enjoy my visit, as a matter of fact. I think he's a dear."

Sophy instantly became the centre of interest.

"Child," her mother gasped, "what are you talking about?"

"I'm just telling you the truth," was the half-defiant reply. "I thought I'd like to see him, so I called. I stayed there an hour and a half, drank China tea and two cocktails, and smoked half a dozen cigarettes."

"But how on earth did you get in?" Lady Agatha demanded.

"Even I couldn't get past old Dowson," Glendower admitted.

"Well, I confess that I used a little strategy, and that

perhaps I had a little luck," the girl confided. "I was crossing the road when I saw Anna, the old sewing maid whom mother brought from Anderleyton, on the area steps of the house. I stopped to have a talk with her, and she took me into the kitchen. They were all having tea in the servants' hall, and I got her to let me slip up the back stairs and into the library. There I stayed until his lordship came in."

Sir Matthew pulled down his waistcoat.

"Most reprehensible," he declared.

"Sophy, I am thoroughly ashamed of you," her mother exclaimed.

"It is the adventurous spirit of youth," Glendower pronounced. "I, on the other hand, Miss Sophy, take off my hat to you."

"What did he talk about?" Lady Agatha enquired.

"Well, he asked me what sort of a young man Clarence was turning out, for one thing." Sophy confided. "I didn't give him away any more than I could help. Then we talked a good deal about the Virgin's Tear — the blue diamond that was missing from Frankley Place after the burglary."

"My dear Sophy," her mother remonstrated, "couldn't you have avoided that subject?"

"Well, he knew that I was there," the girl protested. "And I couldn't help talking about the fight," she went on, turning to Glendower for sympathy. "The way he tackled those two policemen was simply wonderful."

"Do you mean to say," Lady Agatha asked in horrified accents, "that you stayed and watched? It is the first I have heard of such a disgraceful proceeding."

"Of course I did," Sophy admitted. "I never said anything about it, for fear they would want me to give evidence, and I wasn't going to confess that I saw him take the diamond. The funny part of it is, though, that he re-

members seeing me there. He remembers my blue pyjamas."

"Great heavens!" Lady Agatha exclaimed, rising to her feet. "Here come our friends. Matthew, don't say anything about cocktails. If they want them, we'll have them at the table. I shall scream if I stay here another minute."

"One moment, Lady Anderleyton," the Marquis begged. "I see your friends have two young women with them. Couldn't I borrow Sophy? I've only my nephew lunching with me — Guy Darlington. He had a break-down on his way up from Camberley, and he won't be here for another twenty minutes."

"Mummie, do let me stay with Lord Glendower," the girl begged. "I wasn't really asked to the Postlethwaites, you know. They only mentioned it at the last moment, in case I happened to be with you. Quick! They're coming."

"Certainly, my dear," her mother consented graciously.

"We'll look after her," Glendower promised. "I'll drop her at home on my way to the House of Lords."

"You won't," Sophy whispered in his ear, as the others moved off. "I shall make Guy take me somewhere to dance, unless he's obliged to be back."

The Marquis drew her arm through his.

"Come and sit in this corner with me, my dear," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"I'll sit anywhere with you, and let you hold my hand even, if you'll buy me a box of those gold-tipped cigarettes and stand me another cocktail. One's my limit with the family."

"Quite enough, too," was the good-humoured reply. "We'll exceed our allowance, though, this morning, with pleasure. I rather need bucking up myself. I want to talk to you about David. Do you think you're likely to see him again?"

She looked at him half-smiling, half-enquiringly, with a distinct twinkle in her eyes.

"Mum's the word," he promised. "I won't peach."

"Then I'm sure I shall."

"Well, you're the only one who seems to have been able to get into touch with him," her companion remarked, as they reached their corner, and he ordered the cocktails. "Perhaps he'll listen to a child like you when he won't listen to his elders. I'm fond of the young rascal, you know, Sophy — always was. I liked him better than either of his brothers, or any of the rest of the family."

"I'm with you there," the girl agreed. "I think he's awfully good-looking, too. I like those humorous little lines around his eyes, and his lean, fierce mouth. It's simply adorable when he smiles."

"Better not let your mother hear you talk like that," he warned her, "or you may find your liberty curtailed."

She looked at him with wide-opened blue eyes.

"I could say things to you, Lord Glendower," she confided, "I should never think of saying to Mother."

"Well, David's all right," Glendower admitted, "but what I'm very much afraid of is that he's playing a rash game. I couldn't stand all that tosh that Sir Matthew was talking, but all the same, I do think that the police suspect something from the tone of the coroner's examination. Of, course, there's no doubt that in the matter of that burglary, he was let down most damnably by his confederates. I've got it in my mind that he's trying to square things with them on his own account."

She affected to consider the matter with all the seriousness of an older woman.

"David by himself," she reflected, "against a whole band of gangsters! He couldn't do any good at that, could he?"

"No, but that inquest set me thinking," Glendower per-

sisted. "Why did David buy Abbs's Gymnasium? There are forty or fifty young men training there, taking jiu jitsu and boxing lessons."

She laughed softly.

"What a glorious idea!" she exclaimed. "I expect you're right. That's why David has to keep himself shut up."

"That little man who was found with a broken neck in the area was a bit of a mystery," Glendower went on thoughtfully. "There has never been the least explanation of his presence there."

"And don't you remember," the girl pointed out, "David had to admit that the man who was with West when he was murdered was a member of the gang he had once belonged to. Still, why should they want to murder him?"

"Well, one can't clear up the whole business, of course," Glendower acknowledged. "I don't understand that myself, but I believe I'm on the right track. And further," he went on sternly, "I believe you sympathise with it, you little hussy!"

"Who wouldn't!" she laughed. "I call it an amazingly sporting idea."

Glendower shook his head.

"It won't do, you know, Sophy," he pronounced. "They'll have him for certain, if he tries anything of that sort. These professional gangsters have everything in their favour. David will either get into serious trouble — the police don't like people who take the law into their own hands — or they'll get him."

She shivered momentarily, and there was a look of genuine distress in her face.

"How horrible!" she cried. "Can't one do something, Lord Glendower?"

"Well, you seem to be the only person who has access to him at all."

"I don't suppose he'd listen to anything that I said," she sighed. "I don't want anything to happen to him, though. I like him far too much."

"Neither do I want anything to happen to him," her companion agreed, "not only because I like him very much indeed and believe that he has the right stuff in him, but because I should hate that weedy young nephew of his to succeed. I'm afraid I'm not very fond of your people, Sophy," he added, patting her hand. "I know you don't mind my saying so, because they really aren't your people at all."

"I loathe the lot of them," she declared frankly. "I was terribly sorry when Mother married that fat young man, and as for Sir Matthew and Lady Agatha and Clarence, I can't bear the sight of them."

The Marquis coughed.

"Between ourselves, my dear child," he confided, "I feel very much the same way, and that's another reason why I don't want David to get into any further trouble. You're the sort of child, you know, who, when you grow older, will be able to twist men around your little finger. Start young, my dear. It's the fashion nowadays amongst your generation. Start young — and have a shy at David. Get him to chuck this silly business and open up Anderleyton. I'll back him, and I'll see that he comes through it all right."

She passed her arm through his in brazen fashion.

"To think that I never realised what a dear you are!" she exclaimed. "I'll do my very best, but he's a terribly determined person."

"So was Samson before the lady took an interest in him," Glendower observed, as he rose to wave his hand to his nephew.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THERE were seven men seated around the table in the hideous upstairs parlour of the Lion and the Lamb. There was also Tottie Green, ensconced in his inevitable plush chair by the window, with the remains of a trayful of greasy food on a table by his side. Belle, a newspaper in her hand, was reading by the light from an incandescent lamp, in a retired corner. Upon her couch, which seemed to have been transformed into some sort of a bed, lay Cannon Ball Lem, groaning and swearing alternately. Tottie Green lit his cigar and turned to the little company.

"Fishy Tim wins," he announced. "Jim Bordon's a good second, but Fishy Tim wins. Hand him over the fiver, Belle."

The girl stepped away from the lamp, still holding the newspaper in her hand. She unlocked a small safe in the wall, withdrew a five-pound note from a cash box inside, locked the latter up again, and handed the note to a grinning youth whose dirty fingers gripped it eagerly.

"Drinks round," his neighbour at the table suggested.

Fishy Tim leered. He was cross-eyed and he lacked a few front teeth, but he had a healthier complexion than the others, and his clothes, though less flashy were passable.

"Shut up, you silly mutt, anyway!" he enjoined. "Drinks here are free, ain't they? Wait till we get outside. I tell you, Guv'nor," he went on, sprawling across the table towards Tottie Green "this is soft dough for us. They take the money so fast outside that they've got to have a cash box there as well as in the shop. Then, according to the

law, eleven o'clock to the second, they've got to pack up and move in. There's just one cop comes and gives the signal, and perhaps another at the corner of the street — nothing else doing! They ain't too keen on the neighbourhood. We sweep 'em up from both ends. That'll stop any one trying to sneak off with his cash box."

"The idea is good," Tottie Green acknowledged thickly. "There ought to be money there. Eighteen stalls, eighteen shops behind. Four of them jewellers too. Cheap stuff, but even cheap jewellery costs money. Not too much of the rough work, either. We don't want that just now."

His voice trailed away hoarsely. He coughed and sweated, coughed again, and patted his stomach. Belle sauntered across the room, refilled his tumbler and handed it to him. He gulped the contents down gratefully.

"Shorter and shorter of breath I get," he muttered. "When's that damned Nadol coming again?"

"To-morrow morning," Belle replied. "He dressed Lem's wounds already."

"And not a drink would he let me have," came a feeble but sullen growl from the bed. "Wait till I can get up, wait till I can get my hands on that bloody toff as done this to me."

"You should have got away quicker," Belle observed, looking up from her resumed study of the paper. "You knew that West had telephoned. I expect you stayed to take tuppence-halfpenny out of the cash box."

"Cash box be damned!" Lem exclaimed viciously. "If I hadn't let Reuben bustle off first, I'd have been halfway home, and Reuben would have had this, instead of me."

Reuben, from his place at the table, carefully dressed as usual, but a little ostentatious in his display of jewellery, grinned openly. Cannon Ball Lem leaned over from his pillow and shook his fist.

"You swine!" he muttered. "You wait till next time."

"I sha'n't work with you next time, you blunderer," was the glib rejoinder. "It must have taken you five minutes to climb up to the window sill. If you'd gone first, you'd have shut me out, wouldn't you, like we did Dave?"

"Don't remind me of that," Tottie Green growled. "That's what cost us the Blue Diamond. It's made an enemy for us too, and I don't like enemies. If he'd gone straight to the police, where should we have been? Another drink, Belle!"

He choked and gurgled, coughed and spluttered. Half the contents of the glass she offered him went on to the carpet. He wiped the tears from his eyes with his coat sleeve.

"He'll end up — I tell you that, lads — he'll end up by going to the police, and taking his chance of what's coming to him from us. He gives me the creeps with his quiet, sneering ways. We done him wrong, and he's after us."

"Let him come," Fishy Tim scoffed. "He'll get his neck twisted before long."

"Will he?" Tottie Green muttered. "What about Fred? He started out to do the neck-twisting. How do you suppose he got picked up at the bottom of the area, dead as mutton, with a broken back. You don't suppose he slipped, do you?"

There was a momentary uneasiness amongst the little company. Belle looked up once more from her paper.

"What's the use of trying to give them the funks, Daddy?" she asked irritably. "You wouldn't call poor Freddy anything but a worm. If he missed the first time with a knife, he was done for."

"It wasn't often," Tottie Green grunted, "that Freddy missed the first time."

"Anyway," Fishy Tim pointed out, "we ain't got Dave

to deal with Saturday night. There isn't any one in this room, I reckon, who's going to blow the gas about — not another Dick Ebben asking for trouble — and we ain't going to tell the others where we're off to, until we start. There'll be twenty-two of us on Saturday night, and any one who tries to stop us won't be in church on Sunday morning."

Cannon Ball Lem, with a groan, shuffled a little higher in the bed.

"You Lambs," he spat out, "you're getting tea swillers. That's what's the matter with you. You're all scared of one man. You decided to get him out of the way. What are you doing about it? Just because Freddy mucked the job, you all got the funk. Look at me. Ain't I done my bit? Ain't I run my risks? If I'm copped, I'm for the swinging room, all right. You others, you ain't got the pluck of mice. Who's going to take Freddy's place? That's what I want to know. You can plan your Saturday-night raid with a lot of frightened Jews, and white-livered shop hands, but when it comes to a man's work, you ain't even spoke of it. I done my bit; so did Reuben. Dave will mean doing us in more than ever now. I can tell you that. Are you going to sit still until he marches down with the cops?"

Tottie Green nodded ponderously.

"Lem ain't so far wrong," he acknowledged. "He gave Ebben what was coming to him, for trying to squeal, and Reuben, he done his job, too, with Sammy West. They finished their work like men. Dave's done us dirt. He pinched the Blue Diamond and not a bean has he parted with. We got to get rid of Dave. He's only one man, after all, and I guess — I guess," he concluded, his voice again becoming a little indistinct, "a bullet will smash in his brain as easily as any man's. Who's on? Come, now, you lads. Let's hear one of you pipe up."

Fishy Tim moved uneasily in his place.

"I kind of liked Dave," he admitted, "the bit I saw of him. I'd rather have my share of the Blue Diamond. I ain't so sure that Dave's meaning us any real harm."

"Then you're a blasted fool!" Lem declared. "What's he training those lads for, I'd like to know? Besides, hasn't he been in this room and told us what he's going to do to me and to Reuben? You're scared of him, because he broke Freddy's neck. That's what's the matter with you."

"Why didn't you give him his while he was here?" Fishy Tim demanded. "Been in twice, hasn't he, to pay an afternoon call, and you just bowed him out."

"Pretty mugs we should have been," Lem scoffed, "if we tried any of that stuff on him here. He had tipped the office to his chauffeur that he was in this room, let his lawyer know that he was coming here, and spoke to old man Jones down in the bar. There wouldn't have been one of us left by this time if we'd treated him rough. We damned nearly did, all the same."

"And then you forget, lads," Tottie Green pointed out, "this is my home, and I want to stay here till I'm done. I got this room for life, and I own pretty well the whole show as well, and Steve Jones has got my word. He don't want a cop across the threshold, and I don't blame him. We went crazy the other day, I admit, but there mustn't be any more of that. What about you, Reuben? You're the one who's for it, if Dave squeals."

"I did my bit," Reuben declared, "when I stuck a knife into Sam."

"And sneaked off through the window in front of me," Lem growled from the bed.

"Never mind about that," Reuben muttered. "What I say is that I never set out to be a fighting man, and I've done my bit. I ain't a nervous chap, but do you suppose I

don't look round the street corners these days, and listen for a voice or a step on the stairs at night? The cops have never tumbled to us properly, but we can't go on for ever as if they were blind and deaf."

"You ain't got nothing to worry about," Tottie Green reassured him. "You made a clean get-away, didn't you, and there's your alibi, all waiting."

Belle threw down her paper.

"Supposing I take on this little affair?" she drawled.

There was a brief, uneasy silence. Lem turned over with a groan and scowled at her. Jim Bordon, a big Australian who seldom opened his lips, and had, so far, shown not the slightest interest in the proceedings, struck the table with his clenched fist and swore. Reuben's face became white and set with disapproval. Even Tottie Green shook his head.

"It ain't no woman's job," he objected. "Besides, you don't know how to handle a gun, much less a knife."

She laughed reflectively, as though at her thoughts.

"I wasn't proposing to use either," she confided. "A woman can find other ways."

"Well, you ain't going to," Tottie Green declared, mopping his forehead with a large and filthy handkerchief. "Do you hear that, you? Do you think I don't know what your game is? You've had enough of the gang — and us. You'd like to poke your nose into the West End and get off with one of these toffs."

"I'll bloody well see she doesn't," Lem muttered from the bed.

She swung round upon them, her hands upon her hips, her attitude a strange admixture of the Billingsgate fishwoman about to storm, and the Spanish danseuse preparing to allure.

"Daddy Green, you make me sick," she exclaimed. "As

for you others, what right has any one of you to interfere in my affairs? What right have you, Lem? Or you, Reuben? Or you, Jim Bordon? To me you're just gangsters, and pals up to a point, but there's never been more than that between me and any one of you, and never will be. So get that, will you? If I choose to take a fancy to David, I shall take it, and there's not one of you here will stop me; and if you try any dirty business, you'll find that a woman's tongue will sometimes do as much mischief as half-a-dozen automatics. I'm offering to help, mind. I've helped before, haven't I? Who made a fool of old Moses and got the impression of the key to his safe? Who used to find out what days Held was going to Amsterdam, and where he was going to put the stuff he took with him? Who took Jacob Gold out dancing the night you sacked his uncle's place? I don't want any lip from any of you. Do you hear that?"

"Belle's quite right," Tottie Green asserted in a shaking voice. "She's too good for any of you crowd, and you know it."

"They'd better," she added curtly. "There isn't one of them I'd let come near me now or at any other time."

"Quite right, my girl, quite right!" the Chief croaked from his chair. "They ain't your class — not by a long way."

"Gawd, if I could get up from this bed!" Lem moaned.

"What'd you do? Wring my neck?" she jeered. "I'm not afraid of you. Now, listen to me, Daddy Green. You're the head of this crowd, and what you say to them has to go. You want to get rid of David Newberry, and I don't blame you. He's dangerous. What's the use of risking the whole show by trying to knife him? You'll get a squeal, if you don't mind, and it will cost two of you your necks anyway. What is it you want from him? You want to be

let alone, that's all. You want the Virgin's Tear, if he's got it, and you want him to forget the dirty way Lem and Reuben behaved on the night of the Frankley burglary. Very well, I'll see to it for you."

"Good girl!" Tottie Green approved. "Do you hear, boys? Shall we let Belle have a try?"

"No," Jim Bordon growled. "I'd sooner volunteer myself, if no one else wants to. I'll slit the toff's gizzard, and I bet I'll make a clean job of it too."

"I expect you would," the girl scoffed. "And what then? Reuben here has some brains, and Lem has all the luck in the world. A clumsy giant like you wouldn't have a ten to one chance of getting away. You'd bring the cops on us in twenty-four hours, and then there'd be an end of the Lambs. You don't want to see poor old Daddy in quod, do you?"

Tottie Green shook in his chair.

"I should die," he moaned.

"If I take it on," the girl continued, "you risk nothing."

Lem crawled over on his side. For the first time he turned his full face to the gathering.

"What you want to do is to be his — "

She took a single step towards him. She kept her hands by her side, but there was murder in her eyes. The words died away on his lips in a sharp breath. The others watched feverishly.

"No one calls me such names as you had in your mind and gets away with it, Lem," she warned him. "And remember this — if you weren't all fools, you'd have realised it before now — the woman who gives nothing gets most out of a man. I'm not going to tell a scum like you whether I shall give, or whether I sha'n't give, but if I give, it will be of my own free will, and a crowd like you would never stop me."

Tottie Green leaned forward in his chair and rubbed his knees. All the time he was chuckling.

"There's a girl for you!" he chortled. "Do you hear that, lads? I wish she were my own daughter. She should have every penny of my money."

"Do I take this on, or don't I?" she asked, swinging round to him.

"Get me another drink," he begged, "a good stiff 'un, Belle, I'll drink your health, girl. You've got spirit. Go at the business your own way, and stick a knife into him if he don't please you."

The girl filled his glass from the whisky bottle and added a little water. She gave it into his thick, shaking fingers.

"Do I get this job or don't I?" she repeated.

"You get it, my girl," he answered. "These whimperers can go to hell. You get it, and I drink luck to you. Reuben, fill up — round the table. Order more, if more's wanted. Belle's going out after Dave Newberry. Here's luck to her! Drink it, every one of you. Do you hear," he went on, his voice rising with terrifying abruptness. "I'll knock your bloody skulls in if you don't."

They obeyed, because they always had obeyed Tottie Green, but there was murder in the hearts of two of the men who raised their glasses to their lips.

## CHAPTER XIX

The front doorbell at Number 17a John Street rang out a somewhat imperious summons. Dowson, roused from a nap in his sitting room, made his way upstairs, and across the square hall with ponderous dignity, followed, according to now established custom, by two very brawny and undomestic-looking footmen. The former touched a spring and peered out through a little grill. He waved the men away.

"Not wanted," he announced. "It's her little ladyship again. Some day there will be a fuss when her ma gets to know about this."

The two men retreated to the lower regions. Dowson, after a further look around, to be sure that no one was following her, opened the door and admitted Sophy. She greeted him with the familiar nod of an *habituée*.

"You make a regular fortress of this place, Dowson," she remarked. "Any one in?"

"His lordship is in the library, miss," the man replied. "Will you come this way."

David swung round in his chair as Sophy was ushered in. She threw her arm around his neck and patted his cheek.

"You dear, impossible man!" she exclaimed. "Why do you write your own letters? Why not have a secretary? I'm looking for a job."

"You're engaged," he answered quickly. "I suppose you can spell, and that sort of thing."

"Reasonably," she assured him. "What have you been doing all day?"

"I've been down at the Gymnasium most of the time. A very decent lot of young fellows we've got there now."

She shivered.

"I wonder you like to go near the place!"

His face hardened.

"I don't usually give up a thing I start with," he said. "The Gymnasium's going on, even if I lose a few more managers. As a matter of fact, I don't think I'm likely to, though. I've had bars put on all the windows, and the place is under police protection. Now, tell me, child, have you been to Frankley?"

She nodded.

"I've just come back," she confided.

"Any luck?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head.

"Not a scrap."

His face fell.

"You were able to get upstairs?"

"I was there for quite half an hour," she told him. "The room is a sort of library, you know, so I made the excuse that I wanted to look at some books. I searched everywhere I could think of — searched and searched and *searched!* No good!"

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"Tell me," he begged, "what is there exactly between the dressing table of Lady Frankley's room and the door against which I was brought up?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"Don't you remember?" she asked.

"Not one single thing," he confessed. "That's the curious part of it all. I remember seeing the diamond as I leaned over the dressing table. I remember the opening of a door

and the appearance of a fairy in blue pyjamas. I remember springing towards what I thought was safety, and from then until I came to in hospital everything is a blank."

She took up a pencil and sketched rapidly.

"Here's the dressing table in Lady Frankley's room," she explained. "In line with the dressing table is a door, which that night was open. It leads into a passage which you cross, going down three steps and mounting three more. Then there's another door, which was also open. That leads into a large room which they've made into a sort of library — bookshelves all round, a few easy-chairs, but not much furniture. You pass through that and come to another door — the one which your two pals locked against you."

"I see," he murmured. "A short passage, one large room — what about windows?"

"There are three belonging to the library, exactly parallel with the dressing table in Lady Frankley's room. Then there is another in the passage. They are all in line, and you must have passed them on your left-hand side. I believe, as a matter of fact, that the further one was open."

He buried his face in his hands for several moments.

"I wish to God I could remember," he muttered. "It seems too ridiculous. I suppose you tried every likely hiding place?"

"There didn't seem to be many," she admitted. "I looked into a few vases and things, and everywhere that looked possible."

"What is there below the window?" he asked.

"Just flower beds. No place that looked at all likely."

He sat for a few minutes earnestly studying the sketch which she had made.

"It's a queer business," he reflected. "Here, at this

dressing table, you saw the diamond in my hand. I ran down those three stairs, up the next three, along the side of the room to that door, and not a step farther. From within a yard or two of it, I was taken to hospital. Now it is quite certain that the diamond is lost, or Lady Frankley would never have dared to have taken the money for it from the Insurance Company. I am absolutely certain that the gang haven't got it, and there seems to be no doubt that when I was searched at the hospital, I hadn't got it."

"You were searched before you were taken down to the ambulance, even," she told him. "Lady Frankley insisted upon it. You were searched as you lay upon the carpet by that door where you fought."

"More and more mysterious," David murmured.

He continued to stare at the sketch hopelessly.

"I wonder," he meditated, "whether it would be possible for me to get down and see those rooms?"

"Would it be any good?" she queried. "If you can't remember, you can't, and that's an end of it."

"Not quite," he protested. "I've got rather a stupid idea perhaps, but there it is. Mind, those rooms and everything in them are simply a blank in my mind. I can't visualise them. Now, if I were to see them again, I should remember them, of course, and I might remember what I did with the diamond."

"What a glorious idea!" she exclaimed. "You mean, it might all come back to you like a flash."

"That's it," he assented. "Of course it's only an idea, but it might be worth while trying. The thing is, how to get there. I'm not very keen on any more amateur burgling."

She suddenly sprang to her feet and indulged in a *pas seul.*

"An inspiration!" she cried. "David, I've got a per-

fectly wonderful inspiration. I'm invited there to a dance on Tuesday, and to bring a man. You shall be my man. We'll go together, and we'll search together."

"But, my dear child, I am much too old to escort you to a dance."

"Rubbish! You don't look a day over twenty-seven or twenty-eight."

"But think," he protested, "how could I possibly present myself there as a guest, when I have spent six months in prison for burgling the house? They might recognise me, and, in any case, they know the story. They know that I was the burglar who was caught."

"We'll risk that," she insisted. "I think it's wonderful!"

She hummed a bar or two of a popular waltz tune, and moving to the music, threw herself into an easy-chair. She flung her little *béret* on to the table and smoothed her hair.

"David," she murmured, "it's six o'clock, and I know where the best cocktails in London are. Shall I?"

She leaned towards the bell, and he nodded. She pressed the knob with a little sigh of content, and David gave the necessary orders to Dowson. He left his chair and came and sat on the edge of the table by her side.

"Cigarette?" he enquired.

He passed her a box, and she stretched herself out with an air of lazy content.

"David," she confided, "I adore you."

## CHAPTER XX

With his cocktail glass in his hand, David took up a position of advantage in the centre of the hearthrug.

"Sophy," he began, "it is borne in upon me that I must talk to you like an elderly relative."

"Shut up," she scoffed, looking at him with twinkling eyes. "You aren't a relative, and you aren't elderly."

"That makes your surreptitious visits to my domicile the more reprehensible," he declared.

"They aren't surreptitious any longer," she protested. "I told the whole lot, the other day at the Ritz, that I had been to see you — Mother, Lady Agatha and Sir Matthew. Something of a bombshell, I can tell you. Fortunately, that darling Marquis was there, cheered me to the echo, and took me off to lunch afterwards with Guy and him."

"Were your people angry?"

"I don't think so," she answered reflectively. "Of course, every one of the family pretends to think that you're terrible, especially since this inquest, but all the same they want to keep in with you. Their hope is that you'll be so ashamed of yourself soon that you will sneak off out of the country to the colonies and they will all live at Newberry in peace and dignity."

"And what about you?" he asked. "Do you want me to go?"

"I want you never to wander far from my side," she declared earnestly. "You're becoming a habit with me, David. I don't think I could ever do without you and our little talks. My relatives stifle me."

"They are a trifle oppressive."

"I was in an evil humour when I came to-night," she continued, stretching out her hand for his. "I think it was the disappointment of searching for the diamond at Frankley and finding nothing. Now I am so excited that I don't know how I can live until Tuesday."

"I'm not sure about that scheme of yours," he reflected.

"My dear David, why not? Lady Frankley asked me to bring whomever I liked, whether he danced or not. I shall mumble over your name, and I'll lay a hundred to one that there isn't a soul who'll recognise you. By-the-by, do you dance at all?"

"I can get round, all right," he assured her. "I very nearly took a job as dancing pro in Sydney."

"What fun!" she exclaimed. "Let's have a night out and a rehearsal — the Embassy or somewhere. Shall we?"

"Don't be absurd!" he rejoined. "Your people would never let you come."

"That's the fun of it. I can come without being let."

He strolled across to the sideboard for the cocktail shaker and replenished their glasses. Sophy sank a little farther back in her easy-chair with a sigh of content. Her arms hung over the sides of the chair. In the slim perfection of her figure, the allure of which was enhanced by her simple athletic dress, she was like a picture of Atalanta resting, Atalanta, save for the sweetness of her mouth and the glow of her disordered hair.

"David, dear, don't ever marry any one, will you, unless you marry me," she begged. "There's nothing so attractive in the world as a bachelor's rooms and a bachelor's cocktails."

"There's just a chance," he reminded her, lighting a cigarette, "that you may marry yourself."

"I hope I'll marry you some day, when you've learnt to

appreciate me," she replied. "I hate youths, even nice ones. I spent two hours with Guy Darlington the other afternoon, and he never once moved me."

"I might adopt you," David meditated.

"Now you're being improper," she rebuked him. "I believe," she went on, "that arrangements of that sort do exist, even in the highest circles, but they aren't spoken of so blatantly."

"I would simply wish to point out," he explained, "that I am thirty-six, and you are — what is it — nineteen or twenty?"

"Twenty-one next week, and don't you forget it," she told him. "On the seventeenth, if you please, and I want a whole new set of golf clubs. I'll go with you to choose them if you like, and you can give me dinner in the evening."

"Your family are sure to claim you," he sighed.

She looked up at him, and laughed.

"Mother won't even remember it is my birthday," she assured him. "Don't make difficulties, please."

He was suddenly grave.

"I'm afraid," he confessed, "for a short time, except for that dance at Frankley, I can't be counted upon for evening engagements."

She caught hold of his wrist and dragged him on to the arm of her chair.

"You've just reminded me, David," she confided, "that I really came here rather as an ambassadress. Lord Glendower and I had a very serious talk about you the other day. He suspects what I know to be the truth, although of course I didn't tell him so, that you're running this gymnasium with the idea of raising a band of private gangsters. He's awfully keen that you should chuck the whole idea, and let the police set things to rights. He's

convinced you'll get into more trouble, and he's not like the others, you know, David. He really is fond of you."

"There is no man I respect and like more," David declared, "but, as you know, I'm only training this band for one single enterprise. As soon as I bring that off, I shall wash my hands of the whole business."

"I wish you'd do it now," she sighed, "unless," she added, with sudden enthusiasm, "you'd let me come in as *vivandière*. That really would be rather fun. I could come down to the cellars, or wherever it is that you meet, in a plain black dress with a red sash, and a rice-powdered face, and urge your young men on."

"You wouldn't be in the picture at all," he told her, "and I'm not going to run any band of gangsters permanantly. I simply want to smash up a certain organization, but particularly two men who belong to it, and you know why."

"Let the police deal with them," she begged. "Why should you put up an even fight against them? They aren't worth it. They're scum. Let Scotland Yard do the dirty work for you, David, and come and play with me. You haven't half seen London yet, and I'm such a good guide. I'll be your chaperone too. I'll keep all the forward young women away and guide you along the safe paths."

He looked down at her with that rare smile which she had once described.

"I doubt whether the path would ever be safe for me when you were my guide, you atrocious little flirt," he said. "I won't have my head turned, do you hear?"

"You shall, if I can turn it," she threatened. "You know I adore you, David. You're a man, and such a dear one. I'm hoping you'll propose to me on my birthday. Don't look at me like that a second longer, or I shall — I know I shall — "

Her soft, curving lips finished the sentence. He took the fatal step forward into her outstretched arms. She clung to him for a moment. The roof seemed to fall in. There was a mist in the room. . . . David felt the blood pounding through his veins as he drew away in shocked self-contempt. She had turned from him. Her head was leaning against the back of his chair. Her face was covered with her hands.

"Sophy," he faltered, "I'm terribly sorry. I was a brute. And you came here to see me! You trusted me!"

She remained silent; only her shoulders shook.

"I'll never do it again," he pleaded — "never. I don't know what came over me. Don't be afraid, Sophy. You shall be my dear little sister."

She suddenly swung round, and he received a second shock. There were certainly tears in her eyes, but they were tears of laughter.

"You dear, stupid, sweet old backwoodsman!" she exclaimed, twining her arms, gently this time, around his neck. "Please don't be such an idiot. I asked you to kiss me. I wanted you to kiss me. I *meant* you to kiss me. The only thing was," she went on, laughing up at him, "you were just a trifle primitive."

"I was a beast," he confessed.

"Never mind, I loved it," she murmured, "and if you say I'm not to come here any more, I'll come every day."

He drew a long sigh of relief.

"Then you're not angry with me?"

"I shall be, if you don't kiss me again and fetch me another cocktail."

He held her cheeks between the palms of his hands and touched her lips gently.

"One drop more angostura, please," she begged, as he turned away to the sideboard.

Dowson made respectful entrance. There was nothing about his appearance to indicate the seriousness of his errand.

"Detective Inspector Milsom to see you, my lord," he announced.

David moved quickly to his writing desk and drew something from the right-hand drawer.

"Are you sure that it is Detective Milsom?" he asked.

"Quite sure, my lord," Dowson affirmed. "I should not have dreamed of allowing him to pass Saunders and Hayley if I had not been certain. I sat next but one to him at the inquest and heard him give his evidence."

David slipped the automatic back into its place and closed the drawer.

"Ask the inspector in," he directed. "Sophy dear, I'm sorry, but you must run away."

She indulged in a little grimace. The short, sandy-haired man with the snub nose and freckles stepped respectfully across the threshold, carrying his hat in his hand.

"Please introduce me," Sophy begged, as she prepared to take her unwilling leave.

David mumbled their names. She shook hands with the newcomer.

"Mr. Milsom," she said, "this is so thrilling. I have often seen you mentioned in the papers. I do hope you've come to look after Lord Newberry. He's so terribly rash and so pigheaded. Will you try to keep him out of trouble, please?"

Detective Milsom, who had married early in life, and who thought that he had never seen anything so beautiful as the girl's appealing smile, almost lost his nerve. He pulled himself together, however.

"I can assure you, Miss, that I shall do my best," he

told her earnestly. "We don't approve of amateurs interfering in police jobs."

"Lord Newberry is so obstinate," she sighed.

"We shall try to make him see reason," Detective Milsom promised.

## CHAPTER XXI

The detective resigned his coat and hat to Dowson, and, after a moment's hesitation, accepted a cocktail.

"I want this to be a friendly visit, if I may say so, Lord Newberry," he began.

"That suits me," was the brief reply.

"I haven't come here to threaten or bluster or anything of that sort," the little man went on, looking steadfastly at the contents of his glass; "neither do I wish to take any advantage of the fact that we know of your brief association with a certain gang of criminals and what that association cost you. I want to forget all that and just put a few plain facts before you."

"I'm open to discuss anything with a reasonable man like you," David replied. "Will you smoke? There are cigarettes at your elbow."

"I'm not one for wasting words," the detective continued presently. "You joined a company of gangsters who have given us more trouble than any band of criminals for many years. You became one of them. You know their haunts and you could probably identify their Chief. You know, in short, everything we want to know. On your first job with them, they let you down badly. You serve your time and you come out without having squealed. You've come out to find yourself a rich man and a person of consequence. The law of this country, sir, feels that it has a claim upon you. We think that you ought to tell us all that you know about these former companions of yours."

"I am not quite sure that I feel that way about it, In-

spector," David confided. "There are not many things I've been religious about in life, but I have made a point of always keeping my word, to whomever it has been pledged. I swore a very solemn oath at the time I joined this association that under no conditions whatever would I, at any time, betray their secrets. Blackguards though of course I know them to be, I don't think that I can break that oath."

"Not even though they let you down badly?"

"Not even though two of them did let me down badly."

"Your attitude, at any rate," Milsom reflected, "helps me to understand some peculiarities of the situation. It is because of your — may I say quixotic scruples — then, that you are training a gang of amateur fighting men, and you mean to take the punishment of those others into your own hand."

"I am not admitting anything of the sort," David observed.

The detective ignored his speech.

"I suggest, Lord Newberry," he proceeded, leaning a little forward in his chair, "that although yours might have been quite an idea up till a week or so ago, you should abandon it at once, when you consider what it has cost you up to the present. It has cost the life of an honest, respectable fellow who was working for you, and the life of another man whom we suspect to have been one of the gang, and to have been acting as spy for you. You know perfectly well that these murders were committed as part of the warfare which you have challenged. Their brutality is entirely inexcusable. After them, any one in the world would consider that you were freed from any moral obligations to keep your word."

"I prefer to be my own judge and to go my own way," David said.

The little man with the weak face became very impressive indeed. One might have wondered, looking at him then, whether indeed it was such a weak face. The lines about his mouth had suddenly tightened, the eyes were dry and hard, the freckles seemed almost to have disappeared. There was a new note of seriousness, almost of solemnity in his tone.

"You owe a duty to your fellow creatures, Lord Newberry," he reminded him. "You are allowing a band of cutthroats to go free when I believe that half a dozen words from you would bring about their extinction. I admit that my own position here is humiliating. The information which I am seeking from you we should have acquired ourselves. I'm offering no excuses for that. This particular band of gangsters is extremely well organised and disciplined, and, although we have a very shrewd suspicion as to the identities of several of them, absolute proof is very hard to obtain. Therefore I have come to make this appeal to you. I am asking you, in the name of the law, Lord Newberry, and for the protection of society, to give me your assistance. . . . Wait one moment. Let me remind you of this. Can't you realise that they know they're in your hands? Now that this vast change has taken place in your position, they can't possibly believe that you'll keep your oath. Remember what happened the other night — the night of the murder — when you opened your front door at midnight in a hurry without taking the usual precautions."

"How do you know what happened?" David demanded.

The detective threw the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"You are quite right, under the circumstances, to keep your indoor bodyguard," he acknowledged, "but we are watching your house as well."

"The devil you are!"

"The police don't tell everything, Lord Newberry. That isn't our way. We're not always the chuckle-headed asses we seem to be. There was a little man who sprang from the darkness and flashed out a knife which was meant for your heart, only you were too quick for him. He was picked up with a broken neck the next morning in the area."

"You knew that all the time," David muttered.

"We knew it all the time," Milsom continued. "We knew it at the time of the inquest, but we didn't want this particular matter on our hands. Can't you understand, Lord Newberry, that it's crime we're up against, criminals we want to fight. It wouldn't do society or us the least bit of good to put you in the dock for manslaughter, when you were only protecting yourself. Our detective reported the case and was promptly told to forget it. I only mention it now because I want you to realise that, if you don't do your duty as an Englishman and tell the established authorities of this country what you know about this filthy band of criminals, the only reward you'll get will be a knife in your chest or a bullet through your forehead."

"You give me to think," David admitted.

He rose to his feet and paced the room restlessly. Every scrap of common sense he possessed urged him to obey this man's behest, to give them all away — Tottie Green, Reuben, Cannon Ball Lem, Fishy Tim, Jim Bordon, even Belle — the whole detestable gang. He could do it now, in two minutes, and if Milsom was allowed to reach Scotland Yard alive, the reign of the Lambs in the criminal world was over. He scarcely took into account the fact that he himself would probably suffer. There would be enough of them for one at least to squeeze his way under the corners of the net, to see that he paid the inevitable price. Yet this came

to him only as a passing thought. He knew that he was already in as grievous danger of his life as a man could be. His own personal risks in yielding to the law, or continuing the fight, were about equal. They weighed with him scarcely at all. It was the fierce, unreasoning obstinacy of his character which turned the scale.

"Inspector," he said at last, "I've carried this business along almost to striking point, and I'm going through with it on my own account. I'm not going to altogether disregard your appeal, however."

"I'm glad of that, at any rate," the detective remarked gravely.

"I make you this promise," David continued. "If anything happens to me, there will be left in the care of a friend, who will forward it in due course to you, the address of the headquarters of the gang, the name of their Chief, and their two principal meeting places in the East End."

"Give them to me now," the detective begged. "You owe them to the law, sir — to the law of your country. And listen. In regard to this gang of amateur bruisers whom you are collecting, never for one moment think that if we get hold of any of these creating a disturbance that we would discriminate between them and the gangsters of whom we are in search. They're all one to us, and after we've finished with them, there won't be the makings of a decent man in any of them. Prison's hell, you know. You have no right to expose them to it."

"I'm taking the same risk myself," David pointed out, "and I know what prison is."

"You're a very obstinate man, Lord Newberry," the detective regretted. "It isn't as though you had a chance with your scheme. You can't fight the gang, unless you know when they're coming out and what their objective is."

"That shouldn't be an utter impossibility," David ventured.

The detective leaned forward in his chair. He extended a yellow-stained forefinger. He was solemn, almost impressive.

"You got hold of one man who might squeal and help you," he reminded his companion. "In twenty-four hours that man was lying in the office of your gymnasium with the brains battered out of his head. You can't do it, Lord Newberry. You can't prowl with your young men up and down the streets, looking for a band of gangsters who will never materialise, so long as they know that you're about. I'll give these devils the credit they deserve. Their staff work is wonderful. They can melt away at a moment's notice. They come from heaven knows where and they disappear just as mysteriously. When you've got your lads ready for a scrap, there'll be no one to scrap with. Then you'll read in the papers of some brutal outrage at the other end of London, and you'll know that you could have stopped it if you had brought the information you have to the authorities, and if you don't feel ashamed of yourself then, you ought to."

The telephone bell rang. David, thankful for the respite, took off the receiver. As he recognised the voice at the other end, the instrument nearly slipped through his fingers. Almost he fancied that there came with it a breath of that velvety, voluptuous perfume.

"Is that David Newberry? You know who I am. Don't mention my name, please."

"What do you want?" he enquired.

"A few words with you — for your advantage, not mine."

"You're very kind," David replied. "Do you want me to come down to — "

He broke off suddenly. Milsom was looking earnestly up at the ceiling watching the smoke of his cigarette. Nevertheless, it had been a close shave.

"I don't wish you to come anywhere. I will come to you."

"My house is watched," he warned her. "By-the-by, I have a detective with me, explaining all the steps he has taken for my safety."

The sound of her slow laugh quivered down the line.

"How clever of you," she murmured. "I'll be careful. Not your own house. Think of some other place."

"The trouble is," David explained, "that a matter of six yards away from me is seated one of the particular bright lights of Scotland Yard — Detective Inspector Milsom. Now, if I tell you where to meet me, I have rather more than a vague fancy that we should run up against him there too."

The detective listened without change of muscle. He looked, if possible, more blank than ever. In Belle's voice now there was a note of agitation.

"I thought you were keeping away from the police."

"I am, unless anything happens to me," David replied. "Hammer that into the heads of your friends well. If one of your gutter-snipes manages to get a knife into me, every particle of information I have about the whole gang will eventually reach Scotland Yard. Worth knowing that. It's my form of life insurance."

"Very interesting," she drawled. "I am bored with this telephone. When will you meet me — and where?"

"I'm not coming your way," he decided. "If you are in earnest, you will pay me a visit somewhere up this end of the town."

"Very well," Belle agreed. "I am not going back anywhere else that matters for a time. The police can follow

me if they want to. I will come to you at Number 17a John Street in half an hour."

"At your own risk," he insisted.

"I risk nothing," was the contemptuous reply. "I am not an offender. There is no one who would dare to lay a hand on me. I shall be with you at the time I said. Get rid of your little detective and be alone."

David, surprisingly overpowered by the thought of Belle with her amazing personality, her perfume, her flamboyant charms, at close quarters, was suddenly terrified.

"Look here," he protested, "I don't think you'd better do that."

He spoke into a well of silence. There was no longer any connection. He hung up the receiver and strolled over to the fireplace. The detective was watching him speculatively.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "I had better go. Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

"Thanks, no. I'm not going out at present."

"It's a wet night," the detective persisted. "I can wait a short time for you, if you like."

David smiled.

"Very good of you," he acknowledged. "As a matter of fact, though, I'm not going out at all this evening."

"Then she's coming here!" Milsom flashed out. "I'm much obliged for that information, Lord Newberry. You needn't ring for my coat, thanks. I'll sit with you until she comes."

David lit a cigarette.

"Very nice of you to keep me company," he said. "Have another cocktail. We may have a little time to wait. You won't mind that?"

"Not in the least," was the equable reply. "Your room's

very comfortable and you are a delightful host. Besides, we have such interesting things to talk about. Certainly I'll have another cocktail if you wish. Seems to me that we may both dine a little late to-night."

"More than probable," David answered drily.

He rang the bell and ordered the cocktail shaker to be replenished. Then he sank into an easy-chair opposite his unbidden guest.

"Tell me, how did you know the sex of the person to whom I was talking?" he enquired.

"That wasn't very difficult," Milsom confided. "Every one's tone varies according to the sex of the person he speaks with — especially a person in your position, Lord Newberry. I don't think the lady was one for whom you had a very high respect, but all the time in your voice there was just that little note of deference which told the story. A young lady, eh? And coming to see you upon the matter in which we are both interested? An informer, perhaps? I never heard that there was a lady to be reckoned with amongst the leading lights of the Lambs. That may help us later on."

"It may indeed," David assented politely. "If you can prevail upon her to talk, you may manage without me, after all."

Dowson arrived with a replenished shaker and some sandwiches. Milsom gravely helped himself; David followed suit.

"Have you seen the evening paper?" the latter asked politely. "I notice that it is upon the tray there."

The detective shook his head.

"I would rather employ these few minutes of waiting in another fashion, Lord Newberry," he said. "The visit of this lady may complicate things for you or it may render them more simple. I would rather make one last

appeal to your sense of honour, to your sense of right and wrong."

"Isn't it rather an unfortunate moment for you to attempt anything of the sort?" David pointed out coldly. "You have just listened in on a private telephone conversation and are insisting upon taking advantage of the information acquired — well, shall I use plain words and say — dishonourably."

Milsom flushed and bit his underlip for a moment. When he spoke, however, his tone was matter-of-fact.

"I am perfectly justified, Lord Newberry," he maintained, "in everything that I have done and propose to do. If you think otherwise, I am sorry. You should be aware that I might have conducted this interview in a different spirit and with a very different result."

"Don't think that I am angry," David begged, "but you are certainly taking advantage of a position into which you have thrust yourself by eavesdropping. As I think you were fortunate enough to gather, the time has nearly arrived for the lady's visit. I will occupy myself, with your permission, in writing a note. You will find magazines and journals on the table beside you."

The detective made no reply. With his wineglass in his hand, he leaned back, looking thoughtfully up at the ceiling. There was a slightly perturbed frown upon his forehead. He had the air of a man absorbed by some disconcerting thought. The minutes went by. At five minutes to eight, David sealed and addressed his letter and moved towards the bell. Milsom suddenly awoke from his ruminations. He was on his feet like a streak of lightning.

"Do you mind not ringing that bell, Lord Newberry?" he asked.

"Why the devil not?" David demanded. "For one thing I want my letter delivered. For another, unless I give or-

ders, no visitor will be admitted. And for still another, it's my own house."

"Nevertheless, Lord Newberry — "

The two men were at close quarters. With a sudden movement, David swung round, locked both arms of the other man within his own, and rang the bell three times. Milsom's struggles were in vain. It was the latest and the most fashionable of the jiu jitsu clutches.

"Lord Newberry," the detective continued, "I have treated you like a human being, like a private person. I speak to you now in the name of the law. Let me go at once."

David shook his head.

"My dear Milsom," he pointed out, "you stayed here when your welcome was overdue to please yourself. You will stay here for perhaps an hour longer to please me."

The door was suddenly opened. Dowson entered, followed by the two athletic-looking footmen.

"This gentleman," David said, turning towards them, "has been endeavouring to pass himself off as a detective. I find that he is a very dangerous person. Saunders, and you, Hayley, you know the little room we have prepared downstairs for any trouble of this sort?"

"Yes, my lord," was the simultaneous reply.

"You will escort this gentleman there. See that he makes no disturbance. Supply him with anything that he fancies to eat and drink, but make sure that he remains there until I permit you to set him free — a matter of an hour perhaps."

Milsom made no physical resistance. Any attempt at it would have been ridiculous. They took him one by each arm. He looked back over his shoulder.

"Lord Newberry," he said, "I warn you officially you are tampering with the law. You will have to face the

consequences of this as soon as I hand in my report."

"I am not very nervous," David assured him. "Think for some time before you hand in that report, Milsom. Think of our previous conversation. One or two little points, eh? A trifle unprofessional, I think. Never mind. We shall be just as good friends to-morrow, I hope, but this evening I have a fancy for talking to my visitor alone."

He threw open the door. Milsom, unresisting and without further protest, was led away. Almost as they disappeared came the sharp peal of the front doorbell.

## CHAPTER XXII

"The lady to see you, my lord," Dowson announced.

Belle followed very quietly, wrapped from head to foot in a wonderful sable coat. She seemed to him to have acquired a new immobility of poise. There was little left of the flamboyant gestures of her public-house environment. Only her smile, slightly derisive, was reminiscent. She waited until she heard the door close behind her before she spoke.

" 'The lady to see you, my lord!' " she repeated. "Rather like the threepenny novelettes I spend most of my time poring over. So this is the real thing, is it? Butler, footmen, our Dave — Lord Newberry!"

"I don't want to deny myself more than I need of the pleasure of your visit," he said, "but the fact is that this house is rather closely watched. I suggest that we abandon preambles, in case we are disturbed. Tell me why you wish to see me."

She refused to be hurried. She leaned back in her chair and looked round the room thoughtfully — thoughtfully, and as it seemed to him, with a touch of appreciation. Her eyes lingered upon his rare prints and the few French water colours, sole adornments of his walls, and they lingered longest upon the choicest. They swept his row of books, seemed to take in the full joy of a green jade idol, and finally came back to earth and stared hard at his cocktail shaker.

"What is that modern atrocity," she asked, "amongst a paradise of antiques?"

"That," he confided, "is a cocktail shaker. Fortunately, it is half full and there are glasses here. Will you permit me?"

He moved towards the sideboard, but she stopped him with uplifted hand.

"It would be the joy of my life," she confessed, "if never again were I forced to smell or come near any form of alcohol. I have had to spend nearly all my time for years in that filthy room over the Lion and the Lamb. I shouldn't think you'd want any further explanation."

"My sympathy is entirely with you," he assured her.

"Are you interested to know my personal news, I wonder?" she ventured. "I have left my guardian, Daddy Green. I have left that horde of mercenary thieves. I am starting life again."

David's voice was almost tonelessly polite.

"My heartiest congratulations," he said. "I can find nothing attractive in your late associates. I feel even a positive repugnance towards your guardian at times."

"Daddy Green is the best of the lot of them," she declared warmly.

"Quite possible, I should think," he agreed. "There are many others — members of the gang — whom I can only think of with a shudder. I should like to see half of them marched to the gallows, and the other half in arrows and stripes, mending roads on Dartmoor. No, I am afraid I must confess, Miss Belle, that, deep though my admiration for you has been, I have never taken to your friends."

"And how deep," she asked, looking across at him significantly, "has your admiration for me been?"

"It is a secret," he parried, "which I shall never voluntarily reveal."

Her eyebrows were slightly upraised in protest.

"Of course," she sighed, "I have no objection to your

having become a 'lord,' but I do wish that you had not had to change your language with your position. I went to boarding-school myself once upon a time, but after five years of life with Tottie Green and his associates, some of those words of yours are hard to understand."

"I will substitute simpler ones," he promised her. "In the meantime, since you are willing to take the risk of not hurrying with your story, I should like to ask a question on my own account. By what stroke of ill fortune did you ever become associated with that terrible gang?"

She drew off her gloves and looked at her beautiful, long white fingers.

"I suppose I ought to try to make up a very romantic story," she said, "but I won't. My father, as I think I told you before, was Tottie Green's partner, only he happened to have been born in a slightly different station of life. He was a lawyer, as a matter of fact, and his name is Morgan. He had the misfortune to be wounded, arrested and brought to trial, in one of Daddy Green's few unsuccessful enterprises. He is serving now a sentence of penal servitude for life. I believe that he very narrowly escaped a worse end."

"I'm awfully sorry," David sympathised. "I wouldn't have asked you about it, of course, if I'd known."

"It doesn't matter," she assured him. "You may just as well know the truth. Tottie Green, according to his lights, behaved like a brick. He sent me to school at Brussels, and up to a certain age I did everything other girls do. Then followed nightmare. When the time came for me to leave school, he sent for me — there wasn't anything else for him to do, I suppose — and I arrived at the Lion and the Lamb!"

"Beastly shame!" David muttered. "Surely you had some relative or other?"

"Not a single one," she declared. "I stayed on. There

didn't seem to be any way out of it. I suppose I come of a lawless breed. I've been content to know that my guardian was the head of a band of robbers and I have found a certain amount of amusement in listening to their exploits. I'm fed up with it, though — sick to death with the place and all of them."

"I wonder they let you come away."

She smiled.

"They think that I have left just to come and spy on you for a time. They have made a mistake. I have left them for good."

"This is very interesting," he acknowledged.

"They want you, David Newberry," she went on, looking across at him. "They want you very badly indeed, and if I had not intervened to-day, some one else — a better man than Freddy — would have volunteered to be your killer and probably swung for it. I took his place. I am here to destroy you after a fashion of my own."

"Aren't you getting a little creepy?" he ventured.

"The whole thing is so absurd," she drawled. "Life itself seems absurd since I was pitched into the middle of those ridiculous people. I got a little whiff of the past when I entered this room, when I heard your perfect butler murmur — 'the lady to see you, my lord.' Believe me, it's only a flicker of memory. I never belonged to anybody, and I never had a home, and in case you should think that I am hinting at a mysterious and romantic past, let me tell you that the only thing I know about my mother for certain is that she was a lady's maid. My father was struck off the rolls for misappropriation of money, killed a man in a burgling raid, and, as I told you before, is in prison for life. So there you are."

She looked across at him, an anxious light in her eyes, but a defiant smile curving her lips.

"Anyway, I'm glad that you've broken away from that Bermondsey gang," he told her. "You ought to be able to get on the stage, or films, or something, you know. You're very good-looking."

She threw her head back and laughed.

"The first compliment!" she exclaimed. "David, we're getting on. . . . Now, that will be enough about myself. Listen to me seriously, please. I came here this evening," she went on, "from the Lion and the Lamb. They are all waiting anxiously — Tottie Green, Cannon Ball Lem, Reuben, Bordon, Fishy Tim — all of them — to hear what I do to you. They sent me out with a perfect armoury. I have a knife in my garter and a small revolver in my bag here, which I should be terrified to use. So I'm not going to use it, David. If you want me on your side, I'm coming on your side. If you want a little information, I've brought it to you. I'm never going back to the slums. They don't know it, but they've said good-bye to me."

"You may find that rather a dangerous business," he warned her.

"I may," she admitted, "but it had to come. So long as that dirty, unwashed gang fell on their knees and treated me like a queen, as they did when I first arrived, I put up with a great deal. I don't know why. There was a certain excitement about it, I suppose, and there was lawlessness in my blood. Then, lately, they've all, in their filthy way, from Cannon Ball Lem, as he calls himself, to the man who a few hours ago volunteered to become your murderer, tried to make love to me. I didn't want to become morally sick as well as physically, so I took this opportunity of coming away, and I shall stay away. Perhaps I shall go, as you suggested, on the films. Perhaps some theatrical manager will take me into a chorus. Perhaps I shall walk the streets. I don't much mind. I'm an amateur at any one of the three

professions. I shall wait and see which appears the most attractive. You seem a little restless — ought I to say my lord?"

"Don't be an idiot," he replied. "Call me David, as you used to. I can't forget that yours was the first sympathetic word I heard when I joined that rotten band of gangsters."

"What on earth made you join them?" she asked curiously.

"Because I was starving."

"And then all this money came to you when you were in prison?"

He nodded.

"My two brothers were killed in an airplane smash coming from Paris," he confided, "and my father died of shock. The whole thing happened about a month after I went to prison."

"Bad luck!" she murmured. "Those two played you a dirty trick, too. The Lambs don't often let one another down. Tottie Green would have expelled them if he had dared, but he is getting old. He has lost a little of his authority, and Lem is a terrible person to deal with. . . . You still seem restless, David. Doesn't my visit please you? Your room is hot. Do you mind if I throw open my furs?"

"Of course not," he assented. "Let me help you."

She loosened the fastenings. Underneath was a perfectly plain dark scarlet frock, such as he had never seen east of Bond Street. A breath of that curious perfume stole up to him and again he felt that faint shiver which he had previously resented. She smiled — the fine sensuous lips of a Venus, slowly parting, as he bent over one refractory clasp.

"Now I am more comfortable," she confided, one hand resting upon his shoulder. "Do you want me to tell you — everything?"

"Perhaps," he agreed, "although I am perfectly content

to prolong your visit, it would be as well. You see, I have a detective locked up in the cellar, and from what I have seen of him, he is likely to be a troublesome fellow."

With that speech, he gained his end. She stepped swiftly a little away. The light which he feared left her eyes, to be replaced by one of alarm.

"What do you mean," she demanded, "by having a detective in the house? It is to you, I come — to you only. The police! May God shrivel my tongue from its roots before I'd ever open my lips to them. You're different. You're a free lance. You have your grievance. It's your fight against Cannon Ball Lem and his men. I've left them. I've come on your side. But the police — if they come in, I go."

He was safely away now, and he sank back in his easy-chair. He was half ashamed, half terrified at his perturbation. His heart was beating.

"Belle," he explained, "the police are so far from being on my side that they gave me a very nasty time at the inquest the other day, as you may have seen. I've had nothing to say to them and rejected all their proposals. This evening a detective called on me to make one last attempt at getting me to talk about the Lambs. He unfortunately overheard our conversation on the telephone. The bell rang whilst he was in the room, and I couldn't get rid of him. He insisted upon waiting till you arrived. Well, you know I'm pretty well staffed here. I simply had him locked up till after your departure."

She made a little grimace.

"And I wasn't in a bit of a hurry," she sighed. "Well, I'll begin if I must, David. Do you want me for a friend?"

"Of course I do," he answered.

She rose from the chair which she had occupied only a moment before. This time there was a little of the more

flamboyant but amazingly graceful posturing of her sordid home. She stood there, her hands at her sides, her furs thrown back, her scarlet frock a line of flame in the room, looking across at him.

"I am coming to you," she said. "It is for you to say the rest."

Inwardly he groaned, but he kept cool.

"I am somewhat hampered," he reminded her, "by the thought of that detective in the cellar. He is really a very human person, and he hates going without his food. Besides, he knows that you are here, and by this time he will be getting furious."

She looked at him intently. For the moment she was speechless. David never realised until long afterwards how momentous were those few seconds. She hesitated with the air of one making a decision, as indeed she was. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, she continued.

"Very well, then," she said, a subtle change in her tone, "shall I prove myself by telling you of the Lambs' next exploit?"

"There is nothing," he assured her, "which I should like to hear of so well. I've torn my hair trying to think of how to get into that little parliament where your plans are made. Every one was so rude to me last time I endeavoured to appear myself. Ebben became our only hope, and Ebben, alas, is no longer here to help us."

"I take his place," she remarked, with a shade of bitterness in her tone. "They all profess to be madly in love with me, but I suppose I should feel the knife in my heart tomorrow if they knew that instead of coming to destroy, I come to betray. You know the Wallingford Road?"

"Indifferently well. I only know that it is the great riverside thoroughfare from Greenwich to the East End."

"Well," she continued, "just as it gets towards the City, there is a street opening from it called Widows' Row, where the shops on Saturday night do such a tremendous business that they are allowed to have stalls out in the road. The Lambs are going for them at five minutes to eleven on Saturday, just before closing time. And this is where you come in, David. They are going, by special orders, unarmed. It is not to be one of our serious affairs. Tottie Green thinks that until the Swan Alley business has blown over, they had better lie low from that sort of thing. It is to be an ordinary gangsters' raid. They are just going to smash up the stalls and carry off the cash boxes, using their fists when they will. If your lads whom you've been training are any good at all, they'll meet on level terms, at any rate."

"Will Cannon Ball Lem be there?" David asked, with a sudden light in his eyes.

"I'm afraid not," she answered. "He had a little accident a day or two ago, and they haven't even been able to move him to the Nursing Home yet."

"A little accident," David repeated. "When?"

"The night of the murders in Swan Alley."

"Then, by God, it was he whom I shot!" David exclaimed joyfully. "I shot a man in the gymnasium getting through the window. There was blood all around the sill and on the flags outside. The little detective whom I've got locked up downstairs saw him limping down the alley."

She stood silent and motionless for almost a minute. He seemed to see her shaken by some emotion.

"David," she shivered, "we feel our way toward this business. I am going to tell you nothing which would mean a man's life — even a creature like Lem's. I know nothing about his hurt. Every one else will be there, including Reuben."

"Widows' Row, Saturday night, at five minutes to eleven," he repeated softly.

There was a knock at the door. Dowson made his discreet entrance.

"A sergeant and constable of police are outside, my lord," he announced. "They wish to enquire whether Detective Inspector Milsom has been here?"

David reflected for a moment.

"It would be perhaps unwise to tell them that Detective Inspector Milsom is locked in the cellar," he mused. "Better say that the detective was here, but left half an hour ago."

"Very good, my lord."

Dowson left the room. The two moved towards the window and listened intently. Soon they heard the front door close and the retreating footsteps of the sergeant and the constable.

"You had better get away, Belle," David advised, taking her arm. "I shall have to let Milsom go. He can please himself what he does about it."

She leaned towards him.

"I am ashamed," she whispered. "When you told me that you had a detective locked up in the cellar, I doubted you. Forgive me, please."

"I forgive you, all right, but I was telling you the truth," he assured her ruefully. "As soon as you've gone, I've got to face him. He won't be very agreeable for a few minutes."

"Can't I wait somewhere upstairs and hear about it," she begged. "I'm at the Milan Hotel, but I don't want to go back there yet."

"Got a taxi?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Jump into it and get away," he insisted. "This is serious, Belle. We're hemmed in here. Your people are watching me, besides the police, and Milsom's as likely as

not to have the house searched directly he's released. I'll get rid of Milsom and ring you up later at the Milan."

Unseen by her, he had touched the bell. Dowson stood with the door open. She threw a swift glance of reproach at David and her good night was almost perfunctory.

"This lady has a taxicab waiting, Dowson," David said. "See her into it, please."

The man obeyed. He stood out in the gently falling rain, held open the door, noticed the figures lurking down the street, and whispered the address to the driver. As soon as the vehicle had safely turned the corner, David started for the back stairs.

"And now for Milsom," he groaned.

Milsom's attitude at the time, and even afterwards, when he knew the man better, was a great surprise to David. Opening the door cautiously, the latter found his prisoner leaning comfortably back in a chair, reading the evening paper with the help of a single electric light. At David's entrance, he divested himself of his spectacles, folded up his newspaper carefully, and rose to his feet.

"I gather," he remarked, "that the lady has departed."

"She has gone, or I shouldn't be here," David replied. "Not worth while apologising, I suppose?"

"Oh, I shouldn't say that," Milsom observed, as he followed his host up into the more civilised regions. "It's always worth while doing the gracious thing — part of the game, I suppose. I am bound to remind you, though, that you have placed yourself in a very serious position, if I choose to take advantage of it. You interfered with the progress of the law."

"Sounds bad," David admitted. "Have a drink before you go?"

"If I refuse, it is not out of ill will," Milsom confided, buttoning up his overcoat. "It is simply because I have had

two cocktails, which is rather beyond my limit. A word with you, though, Lord Newberry."

David signed to Dowson, who disappeared into the background.

"There was never a man yet in this world," the detective said earnestly, "who did any good by interfering with police business. It's our job to break up this gang of criminals, not yours, but with your help we could wipe them off the face of the earth. Without our help, you're going to get it in the neck. We shall watch over you as well as we can for our own sakes, but remember, you're warned."

"Well, you're a sportsman, anyway," David acknowledged, holding out his hand.

"Next time we meet," Milsom remarked drily, "you may find more need of me. Good night, sir."

## CHAPTER XXIII

With an expression as black and lowering as the clouds from which the fine rain was tumbling, Belle stood at the open window of her little sitting room high up in the Milan, gazing eastwards. Near at hand, the raindrops were like small diamonds, falling against a shaft of velvety blackness. Farther away was nothing but an irregular arc of lights. Even the shape of the near-by buildings was blurred in the gloom. She leaned out of the casement and shivered. Her first evening of liberty. A wave of acute depression swept over her. She closed the window with a shudder. Almost she missed the roar of the traffic, the hooting of motor horns, the unsavoury atmosphere of Bermondsey.

A messenger boy knocked at the door and entered with a milliner's box. She dismissed him impatiently. There were already half a dozen stacked on a chair in the corner — all of them bearing the names of well-known firms in the West End. For some reason or other, the coming of this last one seemed charged with subtle offence. The sullen gloom of her face flashed into anger. She kicked the box towards a corner of the room, savagely, spitefully, kicked again through the hole in its side, leaving a torn bit of crepe de chine visible through the white tissue paper. She stood with her fists clenched, her face convulsed. There was a touch almost of lunacy in her voiceless fury.

The telephone bell rang. She stared at the instrument for a moment, as though barely understanding what was happening. Then a curious change took place in her whole expression. Her wonderful eyes flashed with a sudden passion-

ate hope. Her large hand shook as she took off the receiver.

"A gentleman here to see you, Madam," the hall porter's voice announced.

"Send him up," she directed.

She replaced the receiver, dashed to the mirror and straightened her hair, turned the box with its damaged side to the wall, flew to her bedchamber, and brought back a bowl of roses which she placed upon the table. "A gentleman to see you, Madam." There was a new music in speech, even ordinary, stereotyped speech such as this. She did not pause to reflect that she had never even asked the gentleman's name. There was but one who knew her whereabouts, except eastwards, and from there no one could come. She tried to pick up a newspaper and seem casual. Hopeless! She dashed it to the ground. What did it matter? Pretense was absurd. She wanted David. She wanted to see him as she had never wanted anything before in life. And he was coming. How good for him! What an escape he would have! Why hadn't he promised to come at once? The thought that she might have been out, that she might have been in some other part of the hotel, and the messenger unable to find her brought a cold shiver to her pulses. Then came the ring at the bell. She steadied herself.

"Come in!"

One of the lift men threw open the door. She stood quite still. The shock was too great even for disappointment. Behind him, alone with her now, was a small, unassuming-looking man with sandy hair and freckles — a man who carried a bowler hat in his hand and wore a thick overcoat of unbecoming length — a man whom at first sight she hated for not being the man for whom she had prayed.

"Who are you?" she managed to ask. "What do you want with me?"

"Miss Belle Morgan," he said, with a slight bow. "My name is Milsom. I have taken the liberty of calling upon you quite unofficially, hoping that you might feel inclined to answer one or two questions."

"What do you mean by unofficially?" she countered. "Who are you? I don't receive people here of whom I know nothing."

He laid a card upon the edge of the table.

"I am Detective Inspector Milsom of Scotland Yard, Madam," he announced. "I was at Number 17a John Street, locked in an annex to the cellar, when you came to visit Lord Newberry."

"Did he give you my address?"

"He did not, Madam," was the prompt acknowledgment. "In fact, he was so anxious that we should not meet that, with the help of his servants, he adopted very primitive methods indeed and placed me in confinement. I could have told him at the time that it was scarcely worth while, but he probably would not have believed me."

"What do you mean by 'scarcely worth while'?" she demanded. "And how dared you come here without sending up your name? I do not wish to see you. I have nothing whatever to say to you."

"I am hoping, Madam," he ventured, "that you may change your mind. I did not send up my name because you did not ask for it. As for finding you, that was very easy. Lord Newberry is at the present moment standing in a very peculiar position with regard to the police. He refuses to give information for which we have a right to ask, and the consequence is we are obliged to have him watched. The same thing applies to his visitors. Your taxicab was followed here, and the address telephoned to me, also the name under which you have registered. I knew quite well

that this would happen. That is why I endured my imprisonment so philosophically."

"I don't wish to see you," she decided. "I have nothing to say to you and I should like you to go away."

"That seems rather a hopeless start to our conversation," he acknowledged pleasantly, "but I shall beg you, Madam, to listen to me for a moment or two. I know a good deal of Lord Newberry's past history; so probably do you. I know a good deal, too, of his present schemes — crusade, or whatever he calls it; so probably do you. It is going to lead him into terrible trouble; a fact which you probably know as well as I do. I am therefore all the more anxious to deal professionally with this band of criminals against whom he has so strong a feeling."

"I don't see what you're trying to get at," she remarked, with a touch of her old insolence. "Nothing that you have said is of the slightest interest to me. From the little I know of Lord Newberry, I should think that he is quite capable of running his own affairs."

"He has shown quite clearly that he is not," was the blunt rejoinder. "I would not say that this society of criminals with whom he was associated are afraid of him, but, at any rate, they've made up their minds that he must be got rid of. There was an attempt made upon his life the other evening. From certain information which I have collected, I think that it is only the first of many until the end comes."

"Do you mind telling me exactly what you are here for?" she suggested. "All this kind of talk bores me."

"One reason for my coming was that I imagined you might have some slight interest in Lord Newberry."

"None at all," she declared. "I don't care what becomes of him."

"Then why did you go and see him?" Milsom enquired.

"Who gave you the right to come to my sitting room and ask me personal questions?" she retorted.

"Indirectly, Madam," he pointed out, "the law gives me the right. I will admit, however, that my visit on this occasion might be taken as a liberty. I hasten to tell you, therefore, that I came, that I have asked you to listen to me, and help me if you will, very largely because, by so doing, I am relieved of the necessity of causing you a certain amount of inconvenience."

"I have done nothing against the law," she snapped.

"It is reported to me," Milsom rejoined quietly, "that you are probably the associate of law breakers. That, in itself, constitutes a legal offence."

She threw herself into a chair and eyed him sullenly.

"You get a lot of rotten information," she said.

"Possibly," he agreed. "Sometimes, though, there is a gleam of truth in what we hear. One gleam of truth sometimes leads to another, and so on."

"I've had enough of this," she yawned. "I don't know what you came for and I don't know that after all I'm very curious. I should be more interested in your departure."

"I came," he confided, "because, rightly or wrongly, as I told you before, I imagined that you had some interest in Lord Newberry. I wanted to induce you to save his life."

"At the present moment," she declared almost truthfully, "I don't care whether he lives or dies."

"Then my principal argument in seeking your help is destroyed," he admitted. "May I enquire, before I go, when are you thinking of rejoining your friends?"

She laughed scornfully.

"Your methods are all very well and quite interesting," she conceded, "but don't overdo the ingenuousness. I have never talked to a detective before, but I am not absolutely a greenhorn. Your idea is, I suppose, that I shall call a

taxicab, give my address in a low tone of voice, and lead you by gentle stages to the headquarters of the people whom you are so anxious to track down. Go and find them by yourself, Mr. whatever-your-name-is. You've been asking me silly questions quite long enough. If I do know anything about the gang, I'm not going to tell it to you."

"Not even to save a friend's life?" he ventured once more.

"I told you before that I don't care whether he lives or dies," was the brusque reply.

Milsom took up his hat.

"By-the-by, there's another thousand-pound reward offered for the Swan Alley murderer or murderers, this afternoon," he remarked.

"About as much good as a sick headache," she scoffed.

## CHAPTER XXIV

Belle stood quite still, gazing at the back of the waiter who had made a noiseless entrance and was arranging some glasses upon the sideboard of her tiny salon. There was something curiously familiar about the slant of his shoulders, the shape of his head, with its crop of black, thick-growing hair, the slightly protruding ears. She moved a step forward.

"Reuben!" she exclaimed.

He glanced cautiously towards the door, to assure himself that it was closed, and then turned around with a grin.

"We're the lads, eh?" he boasted. "Old Tottie swears he could get any one out of the swinging room if he wanted to, and I'm not sure he ain't right. This was easy, though."

"Listen, Reuben," she begged, "tell me how you got in. I'm beginning to get nervous about things. I know I'm watched here. David is watched in John Street by the stiffs and our own people. They've been a long time getting on our track, but I'm inclined to think that they're finding it now. Tell me exactly how you got in?"

"Easy," was the well-satisfied reply. "You don't need to fuss yourself about that. I came to the service entrance this afternoon with a load of vegetables. Tim fixed that for me. Then I've got a pal who's a waiter here and I went around to his quarters. He lent me his spare kit and the tray, and here I am. The hotel may be full of stiffs, but there's no one tumbled to me."

"It sounds all right," she admitted, "but they're here, I can tell you. Look at that card on the table."

He picked it up, and read aloud:

"*Detective Inspector Milsom*
*Scotland Yard*"

"That looks a bit tough," he remarked, momentarily staggered. "When was he here?"

"He followed me from Dave Newberry's."

"What did he want?"

"Came to see if he could pick up anything, I suppose. He asked me no end of questions about Dave. We've got 'em all guessing mighty hard. It's dangerous, I tell you. What about the Lion and the Lamb?"

"There's nothing there," Reuben assured her. "We have a dozen of the lads combing both sides of the pavement for two hours every afternoon and evening. I was with them myself for some time yesterday and I can tell a stiff by the smell of him. I never made a mistake in my life. I tell you there was no one there. The old man's all right up to now, but he's as nervous as a big jellyfish. That's why he's sent me up. He don't want you to telephone — not from here, at any rate."

"As though I should be such a fool!" she scoffed.

"He don't want you to come back, either. We all do, but I don't reckon he cares about that."

"If I had my own way, I should never come near the filthy place again," she said vehemently.

"We're none of us class enough for you down there, I suppose," he went on, with an undertone of bitterness in his tone. "I don't know as I blame you, except that I could make out different, if you'd stop those stand-off ways of yours. What's the good of it, Belle?" he added, venturing

cautiously a little closer to her. "You're one of us, after all, although you're a good-looker. Your dad's in quod for a lifer, and you can't get away from it. I've got some of the stuff — enough to make a good start at almost anything I'd like."

"I hate Bermondsey and I hate the whole crowd of you," she declared, shrinking away. "I hate anything that reminds me of the place."

"I don't know as I blame you for that," he conceded thoughtfully. "I can't make out why the old man goes on living in such a pigsty. He's got enough of the dough now for Park Lane. I tell you this, Belle," he continued, his features twitching with earnestness, "I'm not a nervous chap — never been afraid of anything in my life — I tell you this, though. Things are going to close up with us. We've been too damned lucky. The boys are all lousy with money and they can't keep their mouths shut like they used to. It's this last job that will do us in, if we're not careful — the Swan Alley job. Dick had to get his, of course. He was a squealer, but we might have given it to him out of doors and let the other chap alone. A bad egg that, but the guv'nor wouldn't hear of anything different. I wish to Gawd he'd left me out of it."

"How's Lem?" she asked.

"Moved into the Nursing Home yesterday, and a damned good job too," Reuben replied. "He'd be all right if he'd keep off the drink. The Doc. was going for him this morning. I wonder whether these Chicago gangsters can afford to keep a real physician on the staff," he chuckled. "Five hundred quid a year Uncle Tottie pays him regular, and fees. I reckon he'll be busy Sunday, unless we wipe those other chaps out quick."

"I should think you ought to be able to do what you want with them," she said scornfully. "It isn't a very sporting

business. Twice as many of you chaps, and every one of you with your guns and stickers."

"There's nothing sporting about gangster fighting," was the cool reply. "No one ever pretended there was, that I know of. All that you have to do is to get the best of the other chap. You've seen his lordship, eh?"

"Yes, I've seen him."

"You've told him what the boss said?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I've worked the plant with him. Rotten business, but I've done it. Quite a small affair, I told him — just a dozen of you, unarmed except for sticks, with Fishy Tim and you running the show."

"And you're sure he'll be there himself?"

"Certain."

He smiled — a singular travesty of mirth.

"That will be the end of David, Lord Newberry, then," he declared. "Four of us are going to make sure of him, and the Widow's Row Jews can keep their cash boxes this time, so far as we're concerned. We're going to clear off early and leave the rest of them to scrap."

She scowled into the fire. Her face had become heavy and her half-shut eyes had lost their beauty.

"It's a rotten show," she muttered; "just a put-up job. Forty of you to get one man."

"It's the only safe way," Reuben argued eagerly. "He's for us. You've heard it from his own lips — going to wipe us out, he says. Well, we'll see after Saturday night. He's going where his Blue Diamond came from — a good way under ground. Are you sure he tumbled to it, Belle? That's what the boss wants to know. He doesn't want to frame a show like this and then find that David doesn't come along."

"He'll be there, all right," Belle asserted, with her eyes

still searching the embers of the fire, "unless I stop him."

He flashed around upon her. He had been lounging a little limply against the sideboard, but his body had suddenly become tense. His eyes were like steel beads.

"What do you mean," he demanded; "unless you stop him?"

"Just what I said," she answered coolly; "unless I stop him. I'm not frightfully keen on murder, you know."

"Don't call it by such a silly name," he snarled. "Dave's got to be put away. Any fool can see that. Lem nearly got him the other night. We can't afford to wait an hour longer. He's out to root up the gang, we know that, and he's truckling with the police already. We're not pincushion babies to sit still and find our way into the cells, and some of us to the swinging rooms."

"If you'd treated David on the square," she said, "he'd never have been your enemy."

"Oh, blast that!" the young man exclaimed. "He could have come back to us, if he'd wanted to, or he could have played the square lad with the Blue Diamond and bought his way out. He didn't do either. He don't mean to. He's got to go, and don't you be getting cold feet about it. There isn't a man amongst the lot of us, Belle, who wouldn't bring out his knife or his gun for you, but we ain't going to be given away by Dave Newberry, and that's flat."

"Chatty to-night, aren't you?" she observed.

"Well, I came with it on my mind," he confessed. "Daddy sent for me last night, directly they'd moved Lem off. You know old Tottie sits there with his stomach shaking, and the water pouring out of his eyes, swilling drink after drink, till you'd think he couldn't hold it, and he looks for all the world like a helpless old hippopotamus, and yet I'll tell you, girl, he's got the brains of the lot of us. He saw you start off for the West End in them sable furs, and I

guess he felt what I felt. Your old dad was one of us, all right. Tottie always tells us that, but you ain't our class. You've got something of us in you, but you've got something of the toff too."

"Why this profuse flattery?" she mocked.

"Don't gibe at me," he almost shouted. "I know what Tottie was thinking of when he sent for me and ordered up that bottle of champagne. He was wondering what might happen to you up in the West End if his lordship came off his high horse and realised that there wasn't a woman up there with your looks or your figure. I could see the boss thinking that out. Suppose Dave came along with some of the soft stuff, eh? Where should we all be?"

"Up to the present," she confided, "David hasn't brought along any of the soft stuff. He treats me as one of the gang and nothing else. I'll be honest — it might have been better for him if he hadn't. I asked him to come and see me here, and he looked at me as though I were a barman who'd asked the king to step in and take pot luck with him. Dave hasn't tried for salvation that way."

"That straight?" Reuben demanded.

She looked at him scornfully.

"It wouldn't be worth while lying to you," she rejoined.

"That's what I've come to find out," he admitted. "Tottie got a scare, and up I came. I'll just put you through it once more. Dave believes we're only bringing a dozen of the lads?"

"That's what he believes," she assented. "He thinks his boys are going to send that twelve straight into hospital, and you amongst them."

"He believes that we're coming without our guns or stickers?"

"He does that."

He thrust his face almost into hers — a face puckered

and wrinkled, with evil eyes blazing out of their cavernous setting.

"You haven't given the show away to him?" he thundered suddenly.

"Don't try to bully me, you fool," she replied. "I've told you the truth."

He stooped down, and apparently out of nowhere there flashed the blue steel of a knife.

"I'm soft for you — you know that, Belle," he said. "If I got you alone where you couldn't make a fuss about it, you'd be my woman, for all your haughty ways — church or no church. I believe I'll get you, too, some day, but if you go back on the gang, you'll go where there ain't no marrying or love-making, or anything of the sort. I'm straight with you, you see."

"Yes, you're straight enough, Reuben," she acknowledged. "If ever I thought of marrying a common gangster, or letting him lay his hands on me, you'd do as well as any of them, I suppose. But I don't. I never shall. I'm proud of belonging to myself. I can get along like that. You know what happened to Tom Logan?"

"That's right. You stuck a knife into him because he put his arms around you down at the cavern."

"I did, and I'll do it to any one who tries to take me against my will. When I'm ready, I'll give myself, but it won't be to you, or any one like you. Now, what about it, Reube? You've had your say and you've got the truth from me."

He seemed for a moment about to step out of his waiter's clothes — a long, terrible figure of pulsating strength, a criminal but a man. She faced him full of defiance. The struggle was fought out wordlessly. He took up the tray.

"I'll give Tottie the news," he said.

From the door he looked back. The tray was arranged under his arm in almost professional manner. In his way he was an artist, and there was even a touch of the waiter's subservience in his pose.

"Men have swung before now for women like you," he told her. "You're the sort they risk hell for. They generally get what they want first, though."

An ungovernable fit of rage suddenly seized her. She flung the tumbler which she had been holding at his head and missed him by only an inch. She followed him out into the softly lit corridor with its orange and black decorations, furious and trembling. He went chuckling around the corner with his tray.

## CHAPTER XXV

The business of the afternoon over and the will of his distinguished client safely signed, witnessed, and disposed of in his despatch case, Mr. Atkinson condescended to unbend. He accepted a weak whisky and soda and a cigarette, and in legal and uninspiring terms delivered himself of his mind.

"Your dispositions Lord Newberry," he admitted, "are without a doubt in order, and, in a sense, fair. You have made a great heiress of Miss Sophy, and you have left the title, I am bound to say, imperfectly provided for. Your nephew Clarence will have to go very cautiously to find himself living at Newberry."

"So he ought to," David declared. "I have heard a few things about him and seen a few snapshots. He's too much like my sister to please me."

Mr. Atkinson coughed.

"The youth has not a pleasing personality," he confessed. "That is not, however, the point I wish to discuss with you before I take my leave. Since the reëstablishment of our relations, Lord Newberry," he went on, "it seems to be continually my fate to be taking liberties. I am driven to take another. Why this desperate hurry about making your will?"

"Isn't that a little unprofessional?" David enquired. "I thought it was your duty to go about everywhere, urging any client over the age of twenty-one to make or disturb the peace of the next generation of his relatives."

"Quite so, but you will forgive me if I speak plainly. I

have had a great deal of experience in such matters. You are a young man, so far as one can see in perfect health. I am used to taking down the last testament of men in your position who go through their task almost light-heartedly, feeling quite sure that they have twenty or thirty years to live, and that the whole thing is, after all, only a matter of form. I am also used to leaning over the bedside and taking down their last wishes from men who feel themselves upon the brink of the grave. You gave me rather the latter impression."

"Quite right, Mr. Atkinson," David agreed. "It will be touch and go with me in three or four nights' time, and most likely go."

"I knew it," the lawyer declared triumphantly. "I was absolutely convinced from your tone and manner that you were contemplating some enterprise of a hazardous character."

"Gave myself away, did I?"

"Not perhaps to an ordinary person," was the sententious rejoinder. "You may remember that we have had some previous conversation upon the subject of your future. You hinted at a certain crusade upon which you wished to embark before you settled down and took up your place in society."

"Don't let's go into it, there's a good fellow," David begged. "You know quite well that I'm as obstinate as a mule. What I have made up my mind to do, I shall do."

He rose to his feet and, with the tongs, threw a hissing piece of log which had fallen into the grate back upon the fire. The room, a kind of annex to the main library, with its closely drawn dark-green curtains, its heavy Georgian furniture and general air of somnolent luxury, seemed the last word in masculine comfort.

"You are a pig-headed young man, Lord Newberry, if

you will pardon my saying so," the lawyer pronounced.

"Pig-headed is excellent, if adequate," David concurred. "Still, remember this, Atkinson; I have common sense. I have suffered too much in life not to know when my lines are cast in pleasant places. I may complete this little task I have set myself within the course of a few days, and I promise you that if I do, exit Dave Newberry, the outcast and criminal, and enter the Earl of Newberry, quite willing to be patted on the shoulder and patronised by his more moral brethren for the sake of the life which belongs to him. You can take it from me that I am not going to fool about with these guttersnipes a day after I have got my own back from them. That may be very soon. Have a spot more whisky."

"A very moderate quantity," Mr. Atkinson accepted. "I do not, as a rule, take anything in the afternoon, but I am anxious to prolong this conversation with you. I think I told you that Sir Earnshaw Roberts, of Scotland Yard, was a friend of mine."

"I think you did," David agreed. "If not, I'll take it for granted. I'll bet you I know a little chap from there, though, worth two of him."

"Sir Earnshaw is a very distinguished man," Mr. Atkinson said stiffly. "To be Chief Commissioner of the Police requires, as I am sure you will acknowledge, exceptional qualities. Sir Earnshaw possesses them. We meet every day at my club. It has chanced, without my introducing the subject, that our conversation lately has turned upon the theme of gangsters. Sir Earnshaw ridicules the idea of London ever becoming a second Chicago. He admits, however, that there is one gang in London to-day who have so far eluded capture, and with regard to whom they are a great deal at sea. These are your friends, I suppose."

"I expect they are," David assented. "They're the most

obvious-looking lot of louts, when you get close to them, but they're as clever as paint all the same. I could tell you all about them."

Mr. Hugh Atkinson, J.P., a member of the Carlton Club and the Athenaeum, the associate of bishops, trustee of Church societies, and a man of surpassing dignity, broke through the custom of a lifetime. He swore.

"Then why the — hell — don't you?" he demanded. "You'd get your own back that way, save your life, and do your duty to society."

"Your profanity inspires me to tell you the truth," David confessed. "It sounds so much more human than when you were talking about residues and remainders. Here is the plain truth — or at any rate, a portion of it. I could give away that band of gangsters to Sir Earnshaw Roberts to-night or to-morrow, but twelve good men and a coroner would be gathered round my body within twenty-four hours. They're a nasty lot, Atkinson. Believe me, they're a nasty lot, not to be trifled with. You wouldn't think it to look at them, but if one of them heard you talking to me like this, they'd think no more of cutting your throat and mine than you would of bringing down a rocketing pheasant."

"Surely," the lawyer pleaded, "you could rely upon Scotland Yard for protection? Give them all the information you have in your possession. Take a trip to Paris, or farther. Don't come back until the whole gang has been thoroughly cleared up. I don't mind telling you, Lord Newberry — you mustn't consider it a liberty because the House of Newberry is of sacred importance with my firm — I have tentatively discussed this matter with Sir Earnshaw Roberts. He appreciates the whole situation. I have come almost as an ambassador from him. It's the headquarters of this gang they're mystified about — one man

— one man's identity they want to solve. You are in the position to offer them the greatest assistance. A few words from you, and Sir Earnshaw is willing to give his sacred pledge, not only that your safety shall be assured, but that the men against whom you have that special grievance shall be arraigned with the utmost severity. . . . There, I ought not to have disclosed that promise. You may call it an immoral one, but Sir Earnshaw is out to save lives. Every undetected murderer is a black mark upon his sheet."

David rang the bell.

"Dowson will call you a taxi if you have not your car here, Mr. Atkinson," he said. "In the meantime, if you care to bring Sir Earnshaw Roberts to lunch with me on Sunday next, at one-thirty, I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance."

Mr. Atkinson, as he picked up his despatch box and shook hands with his client, had one moment of inspiration.

"That means," he concluded, as he took his leave, "that there is something afoot on Saturday night."

The taxi was brought, and the lawyer drove away. His late host, with a yawn, sank into an easy-chair. Outside, the rain was beating against the window panes.

"David, you pig!"

He turned around with a start. The heavy curtains which separated the semicircular annex in which he was seated from the main library were partly drawn aside. A very pathetic, a very wistful, a very charming face slowly disclosed itself. Then came a lissom, pliable body, long legs, and fingers that stole out to the two sides of the curtain.

"Fancy," she went on indignantly, "sitting hour after hour, drinking wretched whiskies and sodas with that terrible Mr. Atkinson, whilst here I was, waiting impatiently."

"I don't believe your tale of woe for a minute," he replied, as he pushed an easy-chair towards the fireplace. "Look at your hair, and your skirt's all crumpled. I believe you've been fast asleep."

She smiled.

"How clever of you! Almost uncanny. But there, I couldn't help it. I was doing the dutiful young débutante last night, out with Mother, dancing with a crowd of young rabbits who bored me stiff."

She flung herself into the chair, and, leaning forward, rang the bell.

"What's that for?" he asked.

She looked at him in surprise.

"It's past six o'clock," she pointed out.

Dowson received the necessary orders and withdrew. Sophy smoothed her hair, looked into the mirror of her vanity case thoughtfully, and sat up in her chair.

"David," she announced, "during my long and solitary vigil this afternoon, I was visited with a wonderful idea."

"If it's anything to do with the mixture of a new cocktail — " he began.

"Don't be silly," she interrupted. "It's something far more subtle. It will affect particularly our enjoyment of this evening. It may even affect the whole of our future lives. Are you donning an Apache costume to-night and roaming the streets?"

"I certainly am not. No stunts of any sort. My busy evening comes a little later on."

"The affair grows simpler," she declared. "My respected mother is dining in Kensington — somewhere elderly where *ingénues* are not welcome. I have promised to go to bed early."

"That sounds reasonable," he remarked, "especially as you look a little sleepy."

"Don't be a goose," she rejoined. "I've slept too much. That's why I look sleepy. What I need to-night is a bright young man to entertain me, a good floor to dance upon, some really first-class music, and a small supper. You promised me we'd have one soon, and I can't wait till my birthday."

There was a brief interlude whilst Dowson brought in and served the cocktails. As soon as he had gone, Sophy lit a cigarette.

"Well?" she queried, with that fascinating little crinkle at the corners of her eyes.

"All right, so far as I am concerned," he assured her, "but tell me, is this sort of thing done? Can elderly gentlemen take out young women of your tender years unchaperoned? I don't want a furious visit from any indignant relative."

She laughed softly.

"You are funny," she murmured. "Absolutely and hopelessly out of date in most of your ideas. Besides, you are as good as my uncle, except that I am very glad you're not."

"Why?" he asked quickly.

She looked at him and smiled — a smile of reminiscence. Then she knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"Ah, well," she murmured, "there might be many reasons."

## CHAPTER XXVI

The lift man, the hall porter, and the cloakroom attendant of the Milan Court drifted together to discuss the affair. The hall porter was almost breathless.

"She was just an ordinary, decent-looking young woman when she came," he remarked — "a bit tall and lazy-looking like, but nothing out of the way. She was done up in furs and wore one of those little hats, so that I never caught a glimpse of her face."

"Number 68 she is," the lift man observed. "I went to her room with a parcel this afternoon. She was sprawling all over the couch, her clothes half on and half off her, an old wrap round her shoulders. Couldn't make out myself what she was doing in an hotel like this."

"She's the Queen of Sheba all right to-night," the cloakroom attendant put in. "You should have seen them sit up and take notice when she sailed in."

In the meantime, the head waiter in the Grill Room was having his little turn. A commotion amongst his myrmidons attracted his attention to the person who was standing upon the threshold. He had probably never traversed the length of the room at such a pace before in his life. Belle in her strange costumes, lolling about in the public-house parlour in Bermondsey, was striking enough, but Belle in a white chiffon dress of Poiret's, with a diamond necklace whose full history would have required the reading of a dozen crime records, her magnificent hair judiciously dealt with by the hotel barber, would have created

a sensation wherever she had chosen to appear. The *maître d'hôtel* gasped as he gazed at the diamonds.

"Madame desires?" he murmured, a little breathlessly.

"Is this the restaurant?" Belle enquired.

"It is the Grill Room, Madame," the man replied. "I can find you a very nice table if you'll allow me."

She looked around her discontentedly.

"But where does one dance?" she asked. "And where is the music?"

"That will be in the restaurant proper, Madame."

"And where is that?"

"If you will permit me, I will show the way."

She made imperious passage through the crowded room, either unconscious of or indifferent to the fact that at every table she passed, every man, and most of the women, turned to look after her.

"Madame has just arrived?" the *maître d'hôtel* ventured, as they traversed the lounge.

"I have just arrived," she admitted.

"From Spain perhaps, or Paris, or South America?" he persisted, conscious of the fact that he would be besieged by questioners when he returned to the Grill Room.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" she answered indifferently. "I have just arrived."

He accepted the rebuke and at the foot of the stairs leading down to the restaurant handed her over to a confrère.

"Madame desires a table in a favourable position," he explained. "She would like to watch the dancing."

The new *maître d'hôtel* swallowed hard. He had just seen the diamonds.

"If you would be so good as to come this way, Madame," he invited, with uplifted hand.

Belle made another triumphal progress. There was a smile upon her face, however, as she took her seat.

"So this is the famous Milan Restaurant," she remarked, looking around, with the menu in her hand.

"It certainly is, Madame. A very beautiful room, most of our patrons think."

"I don't care for it very much," she decided. "It seems very small to me, and the people are very rude to stare at a stranger so."

"I am sorry, Madame," the man apologised. "I don't think any one meant to be rude. We always find," he went on "that people nowadays are very interested in jewellery, and the diamonds you are wearing — if you will forgive my saying so — are very extraordinary."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Suggest what I should eat," she invited. "I would like caviare to begin with, and asparagus to finish. Bring me something between. I don't care what."

"And to drink, Madame?"

"A glass of vodka with the caviare," she ordered, "and a half bottle of Evian afterwards."

"No wine?"

"No wine."

Belle, with her striking face and magnificent figure, her diamonds and her almost insolent indifference to the interest she excited, was certainly one of the features of the restaurant that evening. Badgered to death with questions, the head waiter himself came to pay his respects.

"It is the first time that Madame has honoured us?" he asked, pouring out some of her Evian water.

"I have been here once before," she replied, "several years ago. I have never stayed here."

"We have the honour of entertaining Madame on this occasion then?"

She nodded.

"I am in the Court, Number 68."

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here often," he said, with a little bow. "Anything I can do at any time, I shall be delighted. Madame is alone?"

"As you see."

"Madame has many friends in England?"

"Very few," she answered. "I know very few people here."

He leaned a little forward.

"You see the gentleman dancing with the young lady in green? Well-set-up — looks like a military gentleman."

Belle saw him all right, but she was speechless. She had recognised David a few seconds before the man had pointed him out.

"That's Lord Newberry, just come into a title and estates," the head waiter confided. "Enormously rich, they say, and a very romantic history. Amongst other stories of his earlier days, they say that he was in prison when he came into the title."

"Indeed!"

"He came here to stay straight from Wandsworth Jail," the man went on. "He left in a few days, though, declared that an attempt had been made on his life in the middle of the night — a thing that was quite impossible with our system of watchmen."

"Who is the young lady with him?" Belle asked.

"A sort of connection, I believe, Madame. If I remember rightly, she's the daughter of Lady Anderleyton, who married Lord Newberry's brother. . . . Madame would like a peach?"

"Madame would like nothing but coffee and cigarettes — the best Turkish."

The head waiter gave the order and hovered around in

the background. Besides the curiosity of many of his patrons, he had his own now to gratify.

The dancing floor became crowded. Belle leaned back in her corner, her eyes seldom wandering far from David and his companion. A child, but in love with him, she decided, with an impatient frown. Herself as yet unrecognised, she watched David with a curious and almost morbid interest. Not the type of face to which she was accustomed, she acknowledged. The mouth was firm enough, almost hard, yet kindly. The eyes seemed to speak of suffering. There was a certain pride of carriage and expression, the dominance of one who had met trouble and never permitted himself to go under. Well, his time had come now, she told herself, with a sort of savage distaste for her share in his fate. He was dancing there, smiling down at his little companion, dancing with the sentence of death written on his forehead. He had not an earthly chance of escaping the gang to-morrow night. Four armed men against one, weaponless and unprepared. What a fool David had been to trust her, or any one! It must be because he was used to speaking the truth himself, because of a certain simplicity of thought which she had always remarked in him, that he should think that she, for no reason at all, was giving away the gang just for his benefit. Murder! That was what it would be. David was out for a fight. She knew very well that he wasn't going to get one. Murder! She realised as she had never realised before the ugliness of Tottie Green's methods. There was something revolting, she reflected, in the thought of a cowardly bullet crashing its way into a brave man's forehead. Men couldn't fight bullets. They could never dodge the knife they couldn't see. This life of crime — she began to wonder whether she was tiring of it all. There was plenty of excitement about it, but very little happiness. She watched this — to her —

absolutely new chapter of life, the dancing and merriment of this gay, light-hearted throng, and began to wonder about happiness. Certainly she had never associated it in any way with that foul, public-house parlour with its reeking odours, its absence of every single indication of culture and beauty. Why, she speculated, had she been content to stay there so long? Perhaps this sudden wave of disgust which had assailed her was, after all, only a phase, and the most fascinating thing in life was still the flashing of lurid colours on to the grim canvas of the sullen night, the hysteria of passion, men grabbing for one another's throats, the stab of flame, the whistling bullet. Horrible! She seemed to realise as though for the first time the bestiality, the brutality of it. She moved her chair an inch or two. From her changed position, she could see the table where David and his companion were seated. He had his chance, she murmured, half to herself. He could have had what he wanted. A man always knows. He classed her with that herd and despised her! Why not? She was one of them. . . .

The manager brought her some very beautiful roses and laid them by the side of her plate. She was conscious all the time of admiring glances from the men, mostly a little too bold. These things afforded her no surprise. She had always taken her beauty so entirely for granted that it had never occurred to her to doubt it. Indifference such as David's she had never dreamed of. Well, it was going to cost him his life.

"Belle!"

She looked up, and her eyes flamed with sudden fury. It was Reuben who stood before the table. It was surprising to her that after years of unrestraint she could moderate her anger, that she could imitate almost automatically the ways and manners of the crowd around. Her voice

was raised scarcely above a whisper, her anger shone only from her eyes.

"How dared you follow me in here?" she demanded. "How dare you come and speak to me?"

He accepted the chair which a waiter had brought and sat down uninvited. He was correctly enough dressed, his manners were passable, his appearance very little different from that of many other young men who were dancing. Nevertheless, she could see nothing but the gangster claiming acquaintance with her, and she was infuriated.

"It was understood," she continued — "clearly understood; you heard Daddy Green promise it — that not one of you should attempt to communicate with me whilst I was on this business. I should never have taken it on otherwise. I should never have come into these parts if I had dreamed that I was going to be followed. It was bad enough when you schemed your way into my sitting room. This is far worse. You have no right to speak to me in public."

He answered coldly and with little in the way of apology.

"Sorry you don't fancy me around," he said. "I'll admit that I haven't said anything to Tottie about it. We're working the show in many ways without consulting him nowadays. Getting too soft for his job, the old man is."

"Why don't you tell him so?" she gibed. "There isn't one of you has the pluck to do that."

Reuben calmly ordered a whisky and soda from the waiter who was still hovering around the table.

"Oh, I don't know about that," he reflected. "I don't think we Lambs funk much. A few years ago I would have said that it took more pluck than I had to show myself here. I killed a man in this hotel once."

"You're asking for pretty bad trouble to-night," she told him. "You're doing your best to spoil everything.

David is here, dancing. If he sees us together, he'll never believe that I've broken with the gang. He'll be suspicious about Saturday night, and he very likely won't turn up at all."

Reuben frowned at the cigarette which he was holding in his fingers.

"That's one way of looking at it," he acknowledged. "I may have done harm by showing myself. On the other hand, Lem and I agreed this morning that some one ought to keep an eye on you up in these parts. How is it that you're not dancing with his lordship?" he went on, with a quick, furtive glance at her. "Hasn't he fallen for you? I thought when you chose to do a little vamping you were supposed to carry a man off his feet. You generally succeed, you know, don't you?"

"Do I?" she rejoined indifferently.

"Talking it over this morning," Reuben continued, "Lem and I came to the same conclusion. If I told you that you weren't being watched up here, you wouldn't believe me. Of course you're being watched. The plain facts are that you've had one interview, and one interview only, with David. It lasted only a short time, and since then you have not been to see him again, nor has he been here to see you. Yet you report success."

He sipped thoughtfully the whisky and soda which the waiter had brought him. She remained silent, looking at him with an air of barely concealed disgust.

"I could understand David believing your footling story," he went on, "if you had got him under your thumb, if he were crazy about you. As he isn't, we don't tumble to it, Lem and I, why he believes it at all. In plain words, we don't understand why he's coming to Widows' Row, expecting to find only a dozen of us, and unarmed."

"If he doesn't come, I can't help it," she said coldly. "I

am sure that he means to, or meant to before to-night, and I am sure that he believed me. To-night will probably change everything. I told him that I was breaking away from the gang. He's not very likely to believe that now, is he? That's your fault, blundering in here where you aren't wanted. If he doesn't show up Saturday night, that will be your fault too. I shall take care that Tottie Green knows all about it."

The young man looked across the table at her. His black eyes were hard and brilliant. His lower lip had fallen a little, showing the red of his gums. He was very intensely in earnest.

"Now sit tight, Belle," he admonished, "and keep your temper, even if you don't like what I'm going to say. David is one of the biggest fools for obstinacy and bravado who ever joined the gang, but I'll grant you that he's not by nature a squealer. Yet, supposing — keep cool, Belle — that he, or you and he together, had decided to work this scheme a different way, and that we found a squad of police with machine guns and armoured waggons down at Widows' Row, eh?"

She leaned back, genuinely horrified. He watched her expression with satisfaction. Nothing could have been more convincing.

"David would get his later. That you know," he went on. "And so would you, but David might say to himself that so long as he doesn't give up the Blue Diamond, he's bound to go out anyway, unless we crumple up. He may have decided to take the risk."

"I think," she said deliberately, "that you and Lem are the two biggest fools I ever knew in my life. God help the Lambs if ever Tottie Green goes, and you two try to swing the show. Personally, I don't believe that David has the Blue Diamond. Secondly, you know as well as I do, that

if he'd wanted to squeal, he could have done it a great deal more safely and reasonably than by arranging for a sham fight. And thirdly, you dare to sit there and suggest that I, Belle, would turn on the gang, with Tottie there, still alive and knowing for an absolute certainty what was coming to him! If you run your scheme for to-morrow night with the same brains you're using now, you won't need any trap from Scotland Yard. The police constable at the corner of the street will be quite equal to the job of marching you all off where you ought to be."

"Yes," he remarked, "I thought you'd be bitter."

She leaned back in her chair, looking at him coldly and distastefully.

"If Saturday night's scheme is a failure," she continued, "you and Lem will be the only ones to blame. You see what is happening? David has found a boy to dance with his little protégée and he is coming over to speak to us. Clever fellow, aren't you, Reuben?"

David paused before their table. He bowed to Belle, and when she held out her hand he raised her fingers gallantly to his lips. Reuben's hand he affected not to see. He addressed him in a half-bantering tone, under which there lurked, however, some shadow of menace.

"My old associates are finding courage," he remarked. "Isn't this just a little risky, though? Reuben, Chief of the Staff of the noble company of Lambs, and Miss Belle, their presiding goddess, exposed together to the gaze of a hundred curious eyes!"

"There's no one here likely to know us," Reuben muttered uneasily.

"One makes strange mistakes that way sometimes," David observed. "You may yourself be possessed of a somewhat elusive personality — very useful to you, naturally, in the matter of diguises — but Miss Belle here

— that's a very different matter. Now, I'm not a flatterer, but I suppose you realise already," he added, turning with a little smile towards her, "that you have attracted a good deal of attention?"

"Have I?" she murmured. "I notice that you, however, have not been one of my victims. You have not even asked me to dance."

"Up to the present," he explained, "I have been the sole escort of a youthful connection of mine. I have parted with her now, though, temporarily, to some naval boys up from Greenwich. If you will do me the honour!"

She glanced up at him for a moment, almost embarrassed. She had had, indeed, very little idea that he would accept her challenge. David who, in a general way, was not observant in such matters, noticed for the first time the almost purple depths in her deep, velvety eyes. The rough insolence of her poise towards the world had suddenly departed. She rose with unaccustomed diffidence.

"You are sure that you mean it?"

They were dancing before he answered, a merely mechanical exercise, for the crowded state of the floor forbade anything very much in the shape of enterprise. He kept well on the outside.

"Of course I meant it," he said. "I am very much afraid of you, Miss Belle, but I agree with the rest of the people in the room that you are very beautiful."

She sought for his eyes, but missed them. He was looking over her shoulder, smiling at Sophy.

"You are very plain spoken," she remarked.

"Isn't that rather the custom amongst the noble company of Lamb?" he rejoined. "I've always thought that in the directness of their conversation, to say nothing of the language used by some of them, they were almost crude."

"They are crude people and therefore they are natural," she admitted. "I wish you would be. I should like to talk to you very much. Three times this evening, whilst I was changing for dinner, I went to the telephone and came away. There is something I should like to say to you. I cannot whilst you are in this mood. I suppose you're a human being like myself. Be natural. It may be for your good."

He sighed.

"It's that fellow Reuben annoys me," he confided. "I don't think I was really cut out to be an associate of criminals. I know that he once killed a man in cold blood in this hotel, and there he sits, perfectly well content and pleased with himself. I believe the brute goes to my tailor too, by the look of the lapels of his coat."

"He is a fool to have come here," she said shortly. "I am very angry with him. He and Lem have got it into their heads that I have fallen for you, and they're afraid that I shall let them down."

"Tell me things, eh?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, I hope they won't call that affair down at Widows' Row off. I'm looking forward to the prettiest scrap of my life. Why, Miss Belle, what's wrong?"

He looked at her in genuine surprise. There had been a little catch in her breath; almost it might have been a sob. She was looking over his shoulder, looking, it seemed, at nothing in particular, with a queer light in her eyes.

It was as though she saw terrible things.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked kindly. "Your friend Reuben is watching you," he added, in a slightly lower tone.

"Turn me away from him," she begged.

He reversed quietly.

"Is it possible to talk to you somewhere alone?" she whispered.

"Not to-night. I have this child to look after."

"To-morrow?"

He shook his head.

"Very difficult, I am afraid. I shall have to put some time in down at the gymnasium, and afterwards you know I'm pretty busy. I do wish there was something I could do for you, though, Miss Belle, to show my gratitude for your information. To tell you the truth," he went on, "that's just what I wanted — a real, hard scrap with the very fellows you say are going to be there. I'll have to be content with what Lem's got for the present, I suppose, but I'm coming after him later. I'm as fond of a fight as most men, but I hate murder. I don't mind telling you that if I could have brought Lem away without involving Tottie Green and the rest of you, I should have sent our friend Milsom down for him before now."

The music drifted into a waltz. There were fewer dancers, and David drew his partner a shade closer to him. For once she felt herself the weaker. Her eyes sought his boldly enough, but remained a little fixed, a little terrified.

"Lem is going to swing," he whispered, and curiously enough his voice seemed to drift into the rhythm of the music. "Lem is going to hang, and if there is anything left of Reuben after I have done with him to-morrow night, he is going to hang, too. . . . You're tired. You would like to stop?"

She opened her lips but made no reply. Suddenly he felt almost her dead weight in his arms. They were close to her table, and he supported her there without attracting observation. Reuben half rose as they approached.

"Belle, are you ill?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing serious, I hope," David replied, as she sank into her chair. "Leave that glass alone."

The two men were facing one another now, standing. David had been the quicker. In his left hand, he held the tumbler of Evian water, from which Belle had been drinking before she got up to dance. There was not exactly a commotion in their vicinity, but the slight unusualness of everything had brought the manager of the restaurant up. David turned to him.

"I believe," he said firmly, "that there has been a deliberate attempt to poison this young lady. There's the fellow who tried to do it — the man who was sitting at her table. Don't let him get away. You'd better send for a doctor quietly and put this tumbler I am holding into a safe place."

The manager took the glass and passed it on to a *maître d'hôtel*, with a whispered word of instruction. David swung swiftly around, for he knew something of Reuben's unpleasant habits. A small crowd of people had left their places and hurried over to see what was the matter. There were one or two scared-looking waiters and a mixed crowd from the adjoining tables, all making impossible suggestions and getting into every one's way. Belle, as pale as death, was leaning back in her chair with closed eyes. Sophy, with her partner, had hastened up. The head waiter, with flying coat tails, was on the spot. But of Reuben there was no sign.

## CHAPTER XXVII

The disturbance at what was called the "Pillar" table in the Milan Restaurant was never thoroughly understood even by people in the immediate neighbourhood. All that they could see was that the striking-looking lady, who had excited so much admiration, and who had been dancing with so much apparent pleasure, had been taken suddenly ill and had been brought back to her seat, that the young man who had come over to speak to her and had remained with her for some minutes, had disappeared, and that there was some trouble about a glass of Evian water, which had been carefully removed by the head waiter. The lady herself was assisted from the room through a side entrance, and the manager went about assuring every one that it was only a case of an ordinary faint. The band crashed out once more with its noisiest jazz fox trot, and Sophy, shivering with excitement, dragged David on to the dance floor.

"David," she exclaimed, "you're wonderful to come out with! Do things always happen like this when you're around?"

"There are exceptions," he admitted, "but infrequent ones."

She shook his arm.

"Don't ride on your high horse with me, please, dear," she begged. "What was the trouble? What was it all about?"

"The trouble was that I ought not to have spoken to the lady at all," he told her.

"But why should she faint when she danced with you?" Sophy persisted. "I think you dance so nicely, David. It seems to make our future so different."

"You little hussy," he reproved her. "Now tell me how you got on with those nice boys?"

"Not at all well," she acknowledged. "One trod on my foot at least half a dozen times; another seemed to think that I was in the chorus at the Winter Garden and asked me if I'd care for a week-end at Le Touquet; and the third boy I danced with never opened his mouth. I like you best, David. I wish you'd tell me more about that amazing girl. Why did she faint? And who was the cold, glittering-looking young man who disappeared?"

"You saw him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Notice him particularly?"

"I rather think I did," she replied. "He seemed funny. Everything about him was all right, and yet he seemed somehow or other as though he didn't belong. What is he?"

"A gangster," David whispered in her ear. "A real, true bona fide gangster. I suspect him," he went on, "of being afraid that the lady was going to be too confidential with me."

"How thrilling! And is she gangster or gangstress?"

"She's one of the crowd," David confessed.

"I wish I could have spoken to her," Sophy sighed. "She's a strange type, of course, but I think she's almost the most beautiful animal I ever saw in my life. And her diamonds, David! Did you see that necklace?"

"Yes, she has plenty of diamonds," he agreed. "All collected from various aristocratic households — little midnight offerings."

"Do you mean," Sophy gasped, "that they were stolen?"

"Pretty well every one of them, I should think. You asked for this, you know, Sophy. You're out with the black sheep to-night. Never mind. I'm due to have a wash and clean-up any time after Saturday. I'm lunching with the Chief Commissioner of Police on Sunday, and I may tell him a few things that will open his eyes. I've an intuition that the days of my respectability are close at hand."

"And after that?"

"What would you like to have after that?" he asked.

"St. George's, Hanover Square, and a honeymoon in Capri."

"You're a forward child!"

"Men are such laggards nowadays," she sighed.

They returned to their table. The manager, who had been hovering around, approached and addressed David in an undertone.

"The doctor has examined the Evian water, my lord," he said. "It had certainly been tampered with. He would like to speak to you in the lounge."

"Time we moved on somewhere, anyway," Sophy observed, gathering together her belongings.

They mounted the stairs, and Sophy disappeared into the cloakroom. The manager presented the physician of the hotel.

"Do you know what became of the young man who gave the lady that tablet?" the latter asked David bluntly.

"No idea at the moment," David admitted. "I'm hoping I'll lay my hands on him later on."

"I can't imagine where he got them made up," the doctor confided, "but they contain a rather rare drug. I shouldn't call them exactly poison to a healthy person, but I doubt whether the lady will be conscious again for twenty-four hours, and she'll need special treatment until then. I've sent a nurse in to look after her."

"Very good of you," David approved.

"I really am not quite sure whether I ought not to report this case to the police," the physician continued. "Can you think of any reason why any one should want to remove the young lady from the world, as it were, for twenty-four hours or so?"

David reflected, frowning.

"I could think of one reason."

"Well, it seems to me, then, that that is what has been attempted. It depends upon her constitution, of course. So far as I can see, she is very strong, and, if so, there will be no evil after effects."

"Nothing you could do to bring her round a little earlier, I suppose?" David suggested.

"There are several things I could do," the physician assented. "Is there any particular object in it?"

"There might be. Something is due to happen to-morrow night between eleven and twelve which she knows about."

"Criminal?"

"That way inclined."

The doctor considered the matter.

"The young lady seems to be all alone," he remarked.

"That's why I'm so glad you've sent a nurse in. I don't think there'll be any trouble about the fees, but, in any case, I would pay them willingly. Newberry, my name is — the Earl of Newberry."

The physician looked at him curiously.

"Very good of you," he acknowledged. "I think I could promise you then that, say by nine o'clock to-morrow evening, the young lady will be, comparatively speaking, herself again. The drug that young man used, however, is a prohibited one. If you can get hold of him, I should hand him over to the police."

"If I can get hold of him,"David replied drily, his eyes

fixed upon Sophy who was issuing from the opposite door, "it won't be the police who will have to worry."

Sophy was unusually quiet during the homeward drive. David drew her hand through his arm.

"Out with it, child," he insisted.

"I'm jealous of the beautiful lady," she confessed. "Why did you dance with her?"

"Devilment," he confided. "I told you that she was a sort of gangster. She's the protégée of the Chief. They stick to one another like wax, those fellows. Her father was head man once with them. He's doing penal servitude for life, and since he went to prison, the rest of them have looked after the girl. They sent her up here to vamp me."

"Has she clicked?" Sophy enquired blandly.

"She has not," he declared. "Honestly, though, I feel that a little diplomacy on my part would have been wise. Unfortunately, I never learned how to run that sort of thing."

"You're not in love with her then?"

"I am not — most decidedly and emphatically not," David pronounced. "I hate that overwhelming perfume she uses, and I hate that covert insolence all the time underlying her manner. She is in her wrong place over here. She ought to be a sultana in some Eastern country. . . . All the same, I think I made rather an ass of myself. Probably the mildest form of flirtation would have contented her, and I am perfectly certain that she had something at the back of her mind which I ought to know. Reuben knew it too, the scoundrel. That's why he drugged her Evian."

"And what are you going to do, now that you feel that something has been kept from you?" she asked anxiously.

"Carry on, I suppose. . . . I say, it's two o'clock," he added, as the car drew to a standstill. "Do you think that

I ought to come in with you, meet your mother, and face the storm?"

"For heaven's sake, no," she begged. "Mother will be in bed, and there isn't going to be any storm. I have a key to each entrance, and Anna lets me up the back stairs. Don't get out, please. Shall I see you to-morrow?"

"I'm afraid not," he answered, and, despite all his efforts, there was a note of gravity in his tone.

She lingered, a faint atmosphere of expectancy about her attitude. Then for a moment the world slipped away. He felt the warm, sweet touch of her lips at the corner of his cheek, the clasp of her arms as they stole around his neck, all the delicate fragrance of her as she leaned her cheek against his.

"Oh, David," she murmured, "can't I — can't I vamp you, dear? Can't I beg you to leave all this terrible business alone? It's unworthy of you. They're pigs, and they made you suffer, and they didn't play the game, but one doesn't meet those sort of creatures on level terms. Deal with them as they should be dealt with. Let the scavengers of law and order take care of them. Don't pit your life against theirs. You'll break my heart if anything should happen."

There was a dim light from the electric standard shining through the rain-splashed window, and he saw the tears dimming to a greater sweetness her blue eyes. Once more, he felt the soft caress of her lips as they sought his. . . .

He had half risen — a little breathless. Her face — her delicate girl's face, a sweet meeting place of smiles and tears — was pressed to his. The eyebrows were uplifted, the corners of her mouth twitched.

"Well, David?"

"Sweetheart," he promised, "I'll go as lightly as I can.

I have the others to think of, but I'll go carefully. We'll get through all right, and if I do — will you — ?"

She kissed him once more before she sprang out.

"It's taken an awful time, dear, to make you ask me that," she said, waving her hand. "Of course I will."

She was gone like a streak of silver flashing across the glittering pavement. His heart throbbed as he leaned forward to watch her vanish down the steps. The bitterness of the last years seemed to have disappeared. Yet for a moment he fancied that there was something portentous in the sound of the sudden raindrops pattering through the leaves of the lime trees.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

In the early morning, from the west to the east, the brim of his hat turned down, his coat collar turned up, Reuben made stealthy flight. Arrived in his rooms, strangely situated in the purlieus of Cannon Street, he changed his clothes, bathed and washed in a neat little bathroom, drank coffee in the station refreshment room, and took a taxicab to Bermondsey. For some reason or other, he was all watchfulness. He dismissed his taxicab at London Bridge, entered the station, and left it by a different exit in a different vehicle. It was ten o'clock before he finally reached the back quarters of the Lion and the Lamb public house and let himself in with a key attached to his watch chain.

He mounted the stairs cautiously, entered the public house drawing-room by an unseen door, and stood looking about him with an air of complete disgust. The apartment had apparently not been touched since the night before. The Venetian blinds were still drawn, the windows tightly closed. The odour of smoke and drink was almost nauseating. The only sound was the heavy, stertorous breathing of Tottie Green, still reclining in his chair. With catlike noiselessness, the young man crossed the floor, pulled back the curtains, and raised the Venetian blinds. The disgust upon his face increased as he turned around to view the room. A half-smoked cigar had burnt itself out and charred a great hole in the tablecloth by the sleeping man's side. Two broken glasses lay upon the floor. An empty bottle rolled on its side. Tottie Green, fully dressed,

save that, as usual, he wore no collar or coat, was lying back, his head on one side, his mouth open, snoring hideously. Cigar ash and stains of liquor disfigured his clothes. The slippers had fallen away from his feet, disclosing thick, crumpled, woollen socks. His face, save for one purplish streak, was of a ghastly yellowish pallor. On the table by his side was a soiled pack of playing cards. Reuben stepped stealthily over and shook the sleeping figure. The awakening in itself was an unpleasant sight.

"What's wrong, Reube?" his Chief muttered.

"Everything," was the disgusted reply. "You've been asleep here all last night and nearly burnt to death. Jim hasn't been in to do the room. You haven't even taken your clothes off. Pretty way for a man to live, who's nearly a millionaire. You won't last another month, like this."

Tottie Green sat up in his chair.

"It isn't your bloody business, anyway," he said. "You're one of my gang, young Reube, and don't you forget it. Why don't you see that the people do their duty, if you find so much fault? You call yourself Chief of the Staff, don't you?"

Reuben moved the advertisement for somebody's whisky from the wall and rang a concealed bell behind. In a moment or two, there was a knock at the door. He unlocked it, and a man entered with a green baize apron tied round him, carrying an array of brooms and a carpet sweeper.

"Open the window at the top," Reuben directed curtly. "Clear this room up. Where's Nurse Angus?"

"Been here an hour," was the surly response. "Couldn't get in. The old man locked the door, and we ain't got the key of his private way."

"Send her up," Reuben ordered.

A woman, in unexpectedly correct nurse's uniform, presently mounted the stairs and entered the room.

"Take him away and make him decent," Reuben begged, pointing to Tottie Green. "I want him back as soon as you've done with him. You mark my words, Tottie," he warned him, as the old man rose grumbling to his feet, "another month or two of this, and you'll leave the room another way — on your back, boxed. A pig couldn't live in such filth."

"What the hell business is it of yours?" his Chief growled, as he clutched at his attendant. "It's what you've been used to that counts. I've slept here many a night after a game of cards and a drink or two."

"You'll hear, when you're sober enough, what business it is of mine," was the snarling rejoinder. "I'm going out into the street till you're ready. I shall be sick if I stay here."

Reuben left the big public house by a side door, for the business of the day had not yet commenced. He strolled into a tobacconist's establishment opposite, looked into a few shop windows, bought a newspaper at a small stall, exchanging a casual and apparently purposeless word with the woman who sold it to him. Afterwards he visited another tobacconist's, purchased a packet of cigarettes, and lingered on the threshold for some time to light one. His eyes were everywhere. . . . Presently he disappeared up a side street, vanished up an entry, entered a yard, descended some steps, slatted on both sides for the rolling down of barrels, opened with a latchkey a door leading into a huge cellar, mounted more steps, then some stairs, and finally pushed open the door of his Chief's chosen abode. The room was swept and cleared of as much of its filth as possible, but the reeking smell remained. Tottie Green had just savagely closed the top of the window with his stick. He was wearing different clothes, but he was still a repulsive-looking object.

"What'll you drink, Reube?" he asked hospitably.

"Nothing at all," was the quick reply. "No more will you, till you've listened to me."

"Shut your mouth, you pup," the older man snarled. "Don't you give me any of your lip. I'm boss of the gang yet, and don't you forget it. Get me a bottle of champagne out of that cupboard."

There was a ring of the old authority in the tone, a gesture of command in the pointed stick. Reuben shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. He even brought out a tumbler and opened the wine. "Why the hell don't you start the day with a cup of coffee, like a Christian?" he demanded.

Tottie Green grinned.

"I'm retiring this month," he announced. "Buy a pub in the country somewhere, I think. I'll take to tea and coffee then. Just now, this suits me better."

He poured out a foaming glass of the wine and drank it greedily.

"Who was here last night?" Reuben enquired.

"Fishy Tim and Tony, Snacks and Jim Bordon."

"Lem still at the Nursing Home?"

Tottie Green gurgled assent. He was halfway through his second tumbler of wine. Globules of foam remained upon his nose and lips. A few drops of perspiration were already breaking out upon his forehead. He sat down in his chair, which had been dusted and polished. On the table beside him was a little pile of newspapers—his daily recreation.

"Waking me up like that!" he grumbled. "Now get at it. What is it you want to say?"

"I've been up west," Reuben confided. "I've seen Belle."

"Who the hell gave you leave to do that?" her guardian demanded angrily. "Up west ain't no place for you. Belle's all right there. You ain't."

"I'm not so sure about that," was the sulky reply. "I'm not so sure that Belle don't need looking after like the rest of them."

"Belle's all right, you fool," her guardian chuckled. "I'll bet she's got the thing fixed. I've never yet seen a man who could stand up against her. They try sometimes — they try to be brutal, they try to be sloppy — but before long she's got them running about in a trap, like a mouse looking for a way out. They can't escape Belle."

A slight spasm distorted Reuben's face, a twitch of the muscles — little more, but it told its story.

"Belle's all right with such as us," he acknowledged. "Maybe she hasn't come across the type of chap who counts with her yet."

"You're not imagining she'd fall for Dave?" his Chief asked scornfully. "His goose is cooked, all right. And, mind you this, Reube," Tottie Green went on, leaning forward in his chair, a terrible look still further disfiguring his bloated face, "don't you nor none of the others try any tricks with Belle. Don't you think I'm to be hoodwinked. You're all jealous of any one she casts an eye on. Let it stop at that, d'you hear? You can be jealous, you Reube, and Lem and Bordon, and all of you, but that's got to be the end of it. She's not your class, and she ain't for you. If any living man," he concluded, his voice sinking almost to a gasp, yet filled with intense emphasis, "if any of you chaps lift a finger against her, for any reason whatever, to hell you go — one or the lot of you. Take that from Tottie Green."

There was a queer ominous silence. Reuben mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, went through the strange business of actually straightening his distorted lips with his fingers. He breathed unevenly for a moment. Then he flung himself into a chair and lit a cigarette.

"You ain't any cause to fear, Tottie Green," he said. "There's not one of us would lift a finger against Belle. Brain clear this morning?"

"It generally is when you don't come blundering in on my sleep," was the brusque retort. "What's your trouble? You think a lot of yourselves, you young fellows, but you always have to come to the old 'un to find your way out."

Reuben glanced up at the rings which he was forming from his cigarette.

"Blue Diamond or no Blue Diamond, we have decided to do David in to-night," he announced, "and with four of us right on the job within a yard or two of him, he hasn't got a million to one chance. We can reckon him wiped out. What you've got to make up your mind about, Tottie, is that the Blue Diamond is gone. We're not going to make any bargain with David. Blue Diamond or no Blue Diamond, he's best out of the way."

"I can't bear to hear you talk like that," Tottie Green groaned. "I can't bear to hear the sound of it. I tell you, Grimes is absolutely potty about that stone. Belle will get it out of him. Give her time and she'll have it."

"What had Grimes got to say?" Reuben asked.

"A hundred and forty thousand pounds," Tottie Green declared slowly. "Think of that, Reube. I just ask you, think of that. I worked it out on the back of an old envelope last night. There's seventy thousand amongst the gang. And he knows where it is, the swine! He took it. He was working for us and he took it. Well, he won't be surprised when he gets his, if he doesn't part. He knows enough of the Lambs to know that he is going out. He's had every chance."

"Has he?" Reuben queried. "We've never tried the Nursing Home."

Tottie Green made no reply. He breathed hard, though. His eyes were fixed upon his companion's.

"There's no man I'd sooner see kicked into the gutter than David," Reuben continued slowly. "I'd kick the last breath out of his body with pleasure. You were asking whether there wasn't something the matter with me. I've got the wind up about Belle for one thing — you're right about that — and when I haven't, I'm asking myself what the hell's the use of slitting the fellow's throat before we've got what we want out of him, when we can do it just as well afterwards? See what I mean, Tottie? So long as he's alive, there's a chance of getting the Blue Diamond. Why not put out his light *after* we've got it?"

Tottie Green poured out a third glass of champagne.

"Now listen to me, Reube," he enjoined. "We'll finish about David directly. Just what do you mean when you say that you've got the wind up about Belle?"

"I reckon she's fallen for Dave," Reuben declared harshly. "I saw her last night, decked up like a princess, sitting in the dancing room of the Milan. Dave was there, and her eyes followed him everywhere. I heard her whisper — whisper before me, mind — that she wanted to speak to him. She got up and danced with him as though she were stepping out of this filthy room into Buckingham Palace. There wasn't much passed between the two there. I watched her lips. When she came back, I know that she'd got it in her mind. She meant selling the show — to save David."

"You're a foul liar," Tottie Green pronounced. "Belle would never do that. She ain't built that way."

"A woman who falls for a man will do anything," Reuben persisted. "The fact that she's fallen for him is another dead certain nail in his coffin, but if she can get him out of the fix to-night, she will."

"Ain't you doing anything about it?" Tottie Green de-

manded. "What good is it sapping away down here?"

"I've done what I could about it," Reuben answered. "The trouble is that David's no greenhorn these days. I dropped one of Nadol's little tablets into her Evian water — don't be a fool, Tottie. It won't hurt her, but if she'd drunk the lot it would have taken her until the day after to-morrow to wake up. Dave saw it. There was pretty nearly a scene. He snatched the glass away and insisted upon a doctor. Fortunately, it was a swell place where they hate a row, and whilst every one was calming things down, I slipped off. I got the matron from the Nursing Home up there, and Nadol, but I'm terrified that the doctor the hotel people called in will hang around. She's safe until this evening, anyhow. That's why I came down to see you."

Tottie Green pulled out a clean handkerchief, which he looked at with disgust. He condescended, however, to wipe his forehead.

"Reube," he said, "this is a tough business, but don't you ever tell me that Belle means squealing."

"She may not be squealing on the gang," Reuben admitted sullenly. "If she'd been able to, though, I believe she'd have got David out of to-night's business. Just in time I was. There ain't nothing she can do now. David will be food for the rats by this time to-morrow, at any rate."

Tottie Green scratched his chin thoughtfully. He looked at the young man with weak, cunning eyes.

"Seems to me you're crazy with jealousy, Reuben," he declared. "I am for giving Dave a week in the Nursing Home. We've never yet found any one who could stick it without opening their mouths. We can put him out afterwards. Do you hear what I say? Am I boss, or ain't I?"

"You're boss, all right," Reuben agreed, "and I'd like my share of the Blue Diamond, same as the rest of you, but you listen to me. We haven't watched that house in John

Street for nothing. There's a little man from Scotland Yard hanging round David for half the time. He's made up his mind to squeal. He's keeping on with to-night's show because he's fallen for Belle's message, and he thinks he's got a soft thing on, but I'll tell you this for sure, and I'll lay big money on it. He's determined already to sell the gang after to-night, and if Belle squeals to him and stops the show, he'll sell us before. That's why I say, Blue Diamond or no Blue Diamond, out he goes to-night."

"He does, does he?" Tottie Green said slowly. "Blue Diamond or no Blue Diamond, eh? What the hell are you trying to kid me for, Reuben? Do you think that drink's made me soppy, or what? You ain't so scared of David's squealing as you pretend. You ain't afraid of Belle's squealing, and I tell you straight I don't believe she'd do it. You think he's got your girl, or the girl you wanted. That's what you'd have him out for. Seventy thousand pounds you want me to pay to see you licking your chops over David's dead body. You know me. I don't care whether David's dead or alive — for the matter of that, I don't care whether you are. You none of you count. Money does, though — money and Belle. Seventy thousand pounds is a little more than I'm going to part with because you've got the wind up about a girl."

"You and your stinking money!" Reuben snarled. "You're full of it already. You want to risk our lives, risk the whole gang for the sake of one more dollop. We're not standing for it."

Tottie Green chuckled. It may have been his idea of a humorous expression, but there was very little mirth in it.

"Dear, dear me!" he gibed. "Not standing for it, eh? We'll see about that. David can go, all right. You can have him when you want, but we'll have the Blue Diamond from him first. Who's taking the lads out to-night?"

"I am," Reuben replied.

Tottie Green chuckled once more.

"That's a good 'un!" he exclaimed. "I bet you keep out of the fighting, my lad. Take care David don't have a go at you. He's a born scrapper, David is, you know."

"He isn't going to have a chance," was the sullen reply.

"You're going to keep out of reach, eh? Very wise, Reube. You're a cunning lad. That's how it is you've done so well. You pick up your hat. Good morning, Reuben. Your audience is at an end. Tell Jim to bring me up another bottle as you go out."

Reuben rose to his feet with a scowl. On the way towards the door, he paused and looked back.

"Well, I'm damned glad you've finished interfering, Daddy Green," he said. "You sit here and swill. That's all you're fit for nowadays."

Tottie Green made no reply, but his stomach began to heave spasmodically. It might have been anger or it might have been some fit of unholy mirth.

## CHAPTER XXIX

There was a sudden silence in the long, bare room — the most secret of the meeting places of the Lambs. It was the silence of mortal fear — the kind of silence during which men hold their breaths and count the seconds of life. The unprepossessing little company had broken off their altercation with almost dramatic abruptness. They all turned towards the door. There was a curious rustle as the fingers of nearly every one of them stole down his clothes to some place of concealment. Fishy Tim, holding a deadly long automatic, rose undisguisedly to his feet. Reuben was the only one who spoke or attempted to deal with the situation. He spoke stealthily, without raising his voice above a whisper.

"Number One, get out the box. Don't throw till I say the word. Number Seven, stand by the cellar door."

One of the young men groped under the table and brought up a wooden case. Another crawled across the room, lifted a strip of linoleum, pressed his heel upon a metal disc, and watched a trap door roll back. Every one was listening intently. Some one with heavy footsteps was slowly descending the sacred stairs, some one who must already have passed through a trebly locked door. As the sound came nearer, however, it became more inexplicable. The footsteps were the footsteps of one, or two people at the most, and they lacked all the caution of any ordinary humans approaching the secret haunt of a desperate gang of criminals. There came no summons upon the door, which was built to withstand any normal charge of dynamite;

instead, there was the soft insertion of a key. Automatically, a fierce, unshaded, electric light flashed out above the doorway, and every other lamp in the room was obscured, leaving the visitor in a yellow bath of illumination, and the company of men gathered around the table scarcely more than shadows. The door swung full open. It was Tottie Green who stood for a moment motionless in the halo of light. There was a single wild moment when Reuben's fingers strayed towards the wooden box and its sinister contents. He conquered the impulse, however. This visitation must be dealt with in a different manner. The lights flared up again. Tottie Green, leaning heavily on two sticks, came down the room.

"Well, lads," he croaked, as he drew near. "How are you all? Thought I'd have a look at you before you started out on this show. Got a word to say too."

He pushed Reuben unceremoniously on one side and took the chair which the latter had been occupying at the end of the long table. He sat there blinking a little and looking down at two rows of surprised faces.

"You might have let us know you were coming," Reuben grumbled.

"Didn't make up my mind till a short time ago," Tottie Green announced, still scrutinising the faces of his followers. "Thought it was about time I showed myself. Some of you might be forgetting what your Chief looked like — might have been mixing him up with a young fellow like Reuben, for instance. I've just dropped round to remind you all that I'm still boss of the show. I shouldn't be able to cut much of a dash at anything like to-night's business, but I'm still as quick on a draw as any one here, and I can still cut the spot out of the ace of spades."

With what, considering his figure and his pudgy fingers, was an amazing feat of dexterity, a blunt-nozzled revolver

suddenly flashed out from his pocket. It covered Reuben so uncompromisingly that he almost collapsed under the table.

"Nothing to be afraid of, my lad," his Chief reassured him. "I've killed a few men in my day, but it's either been a straight fight, or they've been squealers. No mercy on squealers. That's been our motto from the first, you know. A pretty good record we've got. Thirteen years, and the Lambs have never been given away. There were seven in all who tried, down to last year, and seven little holes in the ground were all they knew about it."

The gun went back to its hiding place. Reuben, pallid and nervous, returned to his seat.

"We're in danger of a squeal now, though, and you know it as well as I do, Chief," he said. "It's a question which of us strikes first. We've been talking it out here to-night, and we've drawn lots. We've two gunmen and two knife men chosen. They'll make the thing a certainty."

Tottie Green stretched out his hand for a whisky bottle, helped himself to the nearest tumbler, half filled it, added a little water, and then sipped the contents appreciatively.

"This is the stuff to fight on, lads," he declared. "Bubbly's the stuff when there's nothing doing and the ladies are around, but this warms your blood. Yes, you're a pretty good-looking lot. Number Six there, are you gun or knife?"

"Knife, Boss."

"Show me a quick draw, then, and a double stab, man's height, in front."

Number Six was a clumsy-looking youth, but he was on his feet in a second, and something blue and glittering flashed through the smoky atmosphere to the left and to the right. His Chief nodded approval.

"Good. Glad you've got up the drill. Number Eighteen, you're a gun. Draw for the door, like hell!"

Almost before he had finished speaking, a vicious-looking young man had sprung to his feet, and an automatic was being held with yellow-stained but unfaltering fingers, pointing unswervingly at the entrance. Tottie Green chuckled.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "You'll make our friend David hate the day he thought he could put up flesh and blood against steel and lead. That reminds me, lads, I came down here to talk to you about David."

"You're just in time," a hoarse voice muttered from the bottom of the table. "He won't be here to-morrow. We've got him fixed."

"You've got him fixed, all right, no doubt," was the wheezy reply, "but I've been thinking this over, and I'm not quite sure whether Reube's planning it the right way. That's why I'm down here."

There was a murmur of voices. Jim Bordon's was loud enough to drown the others.

"Only one way to fix a squealer. He's got to have his good and quick. We're not taking any chances with Dave. We don't want a bloody lord blabbing about us."

"Quite reasonable," Tottie Green agreed. "I'm with you, lads, but before you let daylight into Dave, why shouldn't we have the Blue Diamond out of him?"

"And have him peach whilst we're waiting to get it," Reuben muttered. "Besides, we're not sure if he's got it."

"Listen, you chaps," their Chief said. "You haven't got this right. Dave took the Blue Diamond. Every one knows that, and the Insurance have paid the money for it. He's done his term in quod, and as soon as he gets out see what happens. Chucks us cold. Goes and lives like a millionaire.

That's all bunkum about his having the money because he's a lord. Nowadays a lord isn't any better off than you and me, and the Blue Diamond's worth a hundred and forty thousand pounds."

There was a deepened murmur of covetous voices.

"Yes," their Chief went on, "that's seventy thousand quid for you lads around the table. Two thousand quid apiece, and more. Something to retire on, eh? Reube says he doesn't know that David's got it. Where else is it? The Insurance Company have paid. That we know. It hasn't gone out of existence, has it? What Dave did was to hide it before he was copped. He passed the office on to some one, and he's waiting now till the thing blows over to dispose of it altogether. That's how I figure it out, and I reckon I'm generally right."

"Whether you are right or whether you are wrong," Reuben said truculently, "David has got to go. We can't afford to risk our lives whilst we wait to get the diamond back."

"Not so impetuous, please," Tottie Green insisted. "I was thinking of a nice, quiet week or so in the Nursing Home for David. It was your own idea first, Reuben, and a damned good one. I think at the end of that time we should know where the Blue Diamond is."

They fell upon the idea, discussed it and gloated over it. Tottie Green leaned back in his chair, took out a terrible-looking black cigar, and lit it.

"A coffin and a few yards in Highgate are all it would cost us," he continued. "You may have noticed that, unless it's one of our own crowd, people don't often get better who go to Number 15a Mortimer Place. Don't be in a hurry, lads. Think it out. Four of you have got the handling of that one young man. If you can't knock him silly, get him into one of our pet taxis, and away to the Home, instead

of croaking him outright, why you're pretty bad bunglers. What's the whole raid, anyway? If there's a thousand quid in it, it's all there will be."

He blew out a dense cloud of noxious smoke. Every one was listening to him now. He jerked his thumb towards Reuben.

"It's Reube here," he went on, "who thinks he's lost his girl, who wants to put him out quick and give up the diamond. I can't see no sense in it. If you don't think that four of you can bring him in, why try six or a dozen. Once he's in the Nursing Home, he'll have no chance to squeal, and I rather fancy he'll tell us all about the diamond. Some of our nurses are a little persuasive, and the theatre isn't exactly a boudoir."

There was a hubbub of voices. Tottie Green drank long and deeply from his replenished tumbler.

"Talk it out, lads," he invited. "I'm not the sort of boss who comes down here and orders you to do this and do that, and don't tell you why. I like to hear your own opinions. It's a matter of two thousand quid apiece for you if you get that diamond, and David Newberry either has it or knows where it is."

Reuben looked up and down the table, scowling. He knew very well that his cause was lost. There was scarcely a soul there who was not embracing the new scheme. A triumphant smile played about Tottie Green's lips. He could afford not to put the screw on. The more they talked, the more the covetous gleam blazed in the eyes of all of them.

"This stall raid," their Chief reminded them, "at the most would only provide you with twenty quid apiece. Even Fishy Tim didn't work it out at more than that, when the staff have had their whack. What's twenty quid compared to two thousand?"

There was a rattle of glasses upon the table. Fishy Tim stood up.

"We'll bring him in, Tottie," he called out. "We may have to knock him about a bit — he's no fool at a scrap, David — but we'll bring him in."

Their Chief smiled beatifically.

"Sister Angus shall get a bed ready and look after him," he promised. "We'll have him in the accident ward. What about it, Reube, my lad? Are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not," was the curt reply. "I know more than some of you chaps know. I've had David watched night and day — by Ratty Finnigan, for one, and a few lads who are in the same line. He's in touch with the police already. That's what Dave is. They'll smell him out if we don't finish the job in Widows' Row. That's what I'm afraid of. And I'll tell you another thing. There's been a stiff to see Dave twice, and the last time Belle was there too. Belle was there, in his house at John Street, at the same time. What do you suppose those three talked about? I say, let Dave have his to-night, and stop the squeal."

"And what about Belle?" Jim Bordon demanded, rising to his feet threateningly. "You're looking for trouble, Reube."

They all began to mutter and shout at him. He crouched back in his place.

"The lad's crazy," Tottie Green declared. "If any one touches Belle, they'll swing for it, so help me God! If the stiffs want David after we've done with him to-night, they can smell his body out of Highgate Cemetery. If ever one of them enters the gate of Number 15a Mortimer Place, out goes Dave. Nadol can do it with just a whiff and never leave a trace. Anything more to say, Reuben?"

"Have it your own way," the young man muttered, "only I'd just like you all to know this. If Dave keeps a

stiff lip after twenty-four hours, you can count me missing. I'm taking my bit to the other end of the world, and any one who likes can have my share of the Blue Diamond."

Tottie Green held up his glass. They all rose to their feet.

"My lads," he concluded, "old members of the gang and new, Tottie Green doesn't often make a mistake. There'll be two thousand quid each for you before the next week's out, and then, take my advice, I'm through. Let the next lot have what's coming after. Empty your glasses, lads, and good luck to you to-night!"

Then the lamps went out, the trap door rolled open, and they groped their way back to the lighted world.

## CHAPTER XXX

It was a moment of great decisions for David. The clock had just struck ten. He stood alone in his library, waiting for those three cautious honks from outside which were to indicate that his chauffeur and Jacob, his pugilistic footman, were already safe in the car, that the door was open, possible hiding places explored, and that he had only to cross those few feet of pavement. He was wearing a dark lounge suit, with a flannel tennis shirt, rubber-soled shoes, and a béret-shaped cap of black silk, padded round the skull, much affected in those countries where the underworld finds it safer to strike from behind. In his hand, he balanced doubtfully an automatic of the latest type, and in his heart there was a great longing. It was the fight he wanted — the man-to-man fight — but he had no faith in either of the antagonists to whom he desired to mete out punishment. His sense of justice was curiously primitive. For many days he had been haunted by the memory of those two prostrate bodies lying in the office of Abbs's Gymnasium, foully done to death, as he shrewdly suspected, by those very members of the gang who had betrayed him. It was the life for a life he wanted, and by some curious kink of instinct, the desire to take it himself was almost passionate. Nevertheless, he remembered his orders to his own men and the automatic went back to its hiding place. It was within a minute or two of the time for the signal. The telephone bell rang. For a moment he almost hesitated whether to answer it or not. Then, with a little shrug of the shoulders, he took off the receiver. He

was conscious of a poignant thrill as he recognised the faint, throbbing voice.

"Dave! Is that David Newberry? Answer quickly."

"I am David Newberry," he replied. "What is it, Belle?"

"I have dragged myself up from bed," she went on. "Reuben has been too clever for me. A sham nurse, bogus doctor from the Nursing Home. They got rid of the real man. Wait! Don't go, David. Wait till I get my breath."

He heard her gasping at the other end of the telephone, heard fragments of half-uttered words. Then she began again, more coherently.

"David, I cheated you," she moaned. "I lied about tonight. I came to you from — from Tottie Green, with a lie already prepared. If you were kind, I meant to tell you the truth. I'm telling you now, if I die for it. The whole gang are going to Widows' Row — knives, guns, whole outfit. They mean to wipe your men out. And David, they're going to get you. They think you have the Blue Diamond, and they think you're going to squeal. They're out to kill you. David!"

David gave one despairing look at the clock. Already his lads were well on their way to Widows' Row.

"Belle, — " he cried.

There was a scream, an intervening exclamation from the telephone operator, another wild cry, and then a well of silence. From outside came the three stealthy honks from a motor horn.

At the Milan Court, David's brusque demand for admittance to Belle's room was coldly received by the concierge.

"The young lady has been indisposed," the man told him. "She has had a doctor and nurse sent by her own family in continual attendance. They have only this mo-

ment left, and they begged that the young lady should not be disturbed till they returned later on."

"Look here," David explained eagerly, "they're criminals — a sham doctor and a sham nurse. I am Lord Newberry. I know what I'm talking about. The young lady was given something to drink last night in the restaurant, and they've been trying to keep her unconscious. Come up with me, if you like. Send some one from the management with me, but for heaven's sake, don't delay a moment. I tell you that poor young woman is in danger of her life."

The concierge was a man of wide experience and he fancied that he recognised sincerity when he heard it. He called to an attendant, whom he bade to take his place, and rang the bell for the lift. There was a brief delay, during which David almost groaned with impatience.

"How did you get to know of this, sir?" the concierge enquired, looking at him curiously.

"The young lady telephoned me. She was in the midst of telling me something very urgent when there was a scream and a crash in the room. I am perfectly certain that the doctor and the nurse, or some one else who was there, got hold of her then. I know what I'm talking about, Concierge. That doctor and nurse had nothing to do with the hotel, now, had they?"

"You're quite right there, sir," the man agreed. "They came together about a couple of hours after the lady was taken ill in the restaurant the other night. The doctor brought a letter from the young lady's guardian, saying that he was her regular practitioner, and the hotel physician was asked to leave. Naturally, we thought that they had been sent by her own relatives."

The lift arrived at last. The concierge was beginning to be impressed by the seriousness of the situation.

"Never mind the bells, Richard," he directed the man. "Shoot straight up to the seventh floor."

The lift attendant obeyed. The two men made their way swiftly along the corridor until they arrived outside Number 68. The concierge inserted his pass-key, and they stepped into the little hall. He knocked at the inner door leading to the salon. There was no reply. He used his pass-key once more. The door was secured by a bolt on the inside.

"We must try the bedroom," he suggested. "There, on the right."

The key turned readily enough, but the door, apparently obstructed by some object in the room, refused to open more than about an inch. David, leaning forward to help his companion, suddenly slipped. He turned on the electric light switch. Both men looked down upon the ground, and a groan of horror escaped David. From underneath the door, a thin stream of blood into which he had stepped had stained the carpet.

"Don't push any more, sir," the concierge begged, in a shaking tone. "My God, this is horrible! We can get into the room from Number 66. Come this way, sir."

They staggered out into the corridor. This time, there were no difficulties ahead of them. The door of the next room opened easily, and they made their way at once into the bedroom. The stumpy fingers of the concierge were trembling as he turned on the switch. They looked around, and horror kept them voiceless. . . .

The curtains were drawn, but in the flood of shaded light, streaming down now from a ceiling lamp, the whole contents of the room were visible. The apartment was a scene of wild disorder. The cloth had apparently been dragged from the table at the side of the bed, and the bottles upon it had been scattered in all directions. Belle,

who might have been trying to escape from the room, was lying against the door, almost at full length, one hand, with the fingers clenched, stretched out as though in agony, the other still clutching the receiver of the telephone which she had pulled on to the floor. Her face was drained of colour, her sleeve was turned back, and there was a red mark upon her arm, as though from a hypodermic needle. Most appalling sight of all, though, from her side protruded the handle of a crude but wicked-looking knife. The front of her white skirt — she was still wearing a portion of her toilette of the evening before, was stained and splashed with blood.

"Touch nothing," David ordered, dully impressed by the sound of his own voice, which seemed to come to him from a long way off. "Send for the manager or some one from the office. Pull yourself together, man. There's the telephone in the next room."

The concierge turned unsteadily to do his bidding, but the rumour that there was something wrong had already spread through the place, and the manager himself was knocking at the door. David drew him for a moment out into the corridor.

"You remember the young lady who was occupying this room?" he asked. "I found some one tampering with her Evian water in the restaurant last night, and she was brought up here afterwards, ill."

"I remember perfectly well, my lord," the man replied. "Her own nurse and doctor arrived, sent by her people from somewhere, and our hotel physician was asked to give up the case. The nurse and doctor have been with her most of the day. They have only just left and begged that she should not be disturbed."

"Well, between them, they've committed a murder," David confided.

The man stared at him, speechless.

"I mean what I say. A quarter of an hour ago, my telephone bell rang. The young lady tried to speak to me. She said a few words. Then some one who was in the room dragged her away from the instrument, and I heard her scream. I came around here at once. The concierge brought me up."

"I had better look inside," the manager decided.

David stood back and followed him into the bedroom. The concierge was sitting on the edge of the bed, his face buried in his hands, sobbing.

"I am sorry, sir, but I can't bear it, I can't bear it," he groaned. "Such a beautiful young lady too!"

The manager looked down at the prostrate figure, and the colour slowly left his cheeks. He gripped at the wall with the palm of his hand. He was obviously on the point of swooning.

"Mr. Helder," David begged, "this is a terrible shock, but try and pull yourself together. Send for the hotel doctor and the police. I am sorry to say that I must hurry away to stop further mischief, but I will come back again as soon as I can."

The man glanced at David's unusual costume with glazed and uncomprehending eyes. He felt sick and ill and without strength to resist.

"You ought to stay until the police have been," he faltered. "You appear to know more about the affair than we do."

"Whatever I know," David rejoined, "I shall probably know more when I return. I am going to look for the man who I think is responsible for this before he can get away. You know my address, and where I am to be found. If I am alive, I shall be there before morning — if I have not returned here."

Helder, the imperturbable, the suave doyen of hotel managers, kept on telling himself that such men as he never gave way, that they should be prepared to meet every eventuality of life. The room was swaying around him, though, and a terrible sense of nausea was fast overcoming him. David took him by the arm and led him to the lift. They descended together. With a last effort, Helder staggered towards the concierge's desk.

"Send Doctor Milton up to Number 68," he ordered. "Telephone to Scotland Yard at once to send an inspector round. Something has happened — oh, my God!"

He swayed on his feet and fainted away. David laid him down on a divan. He himself passed through the revolving doors and into the waiting car.

## CHAPTER XXXI

Sub-Commissioner Marlowe was a man who loved fresh air. The windows in his roomy office on the famous fourth floor of Scotland Yard were thrown wide open to let in the April sunshine, which, on this particular morning, seemed possessed of peculiarly searching qualities. It brought out the wrinkles on the Sub-Commissioner's face. It showed patches of dust in various corners of the room, where no dust should have been. It disclosed the fact that the expectant shorthand writer, seated at his table with a pile of recently sharpened pencils before him, was wearing a tie a little more gaudy than was in keeping with his environment. It also revealed the fact that, during the last few weeks, Detective Inspector Milsom, with his little snub nose and his freckles, had palpably aged. There were others suffering under the same sense of strain. Probably never before in the history of that little company of men, some in the forefront, and some working behind the scenes, had they been faced with a crisis bristling with so many difficulties, so shrieking for solution, so difficult to solve.

The Sub-Commissioner pushed aside a little mass of papers with a weary gesture.

"One gets tired of all these contrary reports," he said, "this mass of detail which seems to lead us nowhere. What the public demands, and what it is our bounden duty to discover, is first of all the murderer or murderers of that girl at the Milan Hotel, secondly the headquarters and personnel of the gangsters in that Widows' Row affair,

and thirdly some explanation of the complete disappearance of Lord Newberry. What's the time, Milsom?"

"Half-past ten, sir."

"Very good. When is your visitor due this morning?"

"Eleven o'clock, sir. I thought you would like plenty of time to look through these papers concerning the people whom I have asked to call."

"Quite right," his Chief assented. "Now I don't want to addle your brain any more, Milsom, or mine. We've been into this matter a dozen times already, but there are several things I'd like to just mention before we start our humble third-degree attack. I have studied every newspaper, of course, giving any report of this affair at the Widows' Row last Saturday week. I have come to the conclusion that the best account is here. Draw up your chair by my side and read this word by word with me."

The Sub-Commissioner spread out a newspaper. The two men both lit their pipes. They pored over it together.

"My eyesight is not so good as yours," Marlowe admitted, "although heaven knows the headlines are big enough. Read it aloud, Milsom, slowly and distinctly."

Detective Inspector Milsom cleared his throat and read:

"DESPERATE GANGSTER FIGHT IN THE EAST END
WIDOWS' ROW THE SCENE OF
THE MOST BLOODTHIRSTY AFFRAY
EVER KNOWN IN LONDON
RIVAL BANDS OF MARAUDERS IN CONFLICT
BOMBS THROWN AND MANY KILLED AND INJURED

"An extraordinary conflict, apparently between two rival bands of gangsters, took place last night in Widows' Row soon after eleven o'clock. Full and clear particulars are exceedingly hard to obtain, as the whole of the inhabitants of the place seem paralysed with fear, but the affair commenced with the throwing of a bomb, for some

unexplained reason, at a private motor car which was just turning into the avenue. The motor car was wrecked, the chauffeur badly injured, and a man by his side killed outright. Bystanders declare that the car contained a single occupant, of whom, however, nothing has been heard. The throwing of the bomb seems to have become the signal for a general attack upon the stall holders and shopkeepers of the neighbourhood by an organised band of gangsters, whose methods were painfully reminiscent of several other recent exploits of the same description. Widows' Row is a broad thoroughfare situated between Talworth and Limehouse, in perhaps the most dangerous and lawless portion of the East End. It is near enough to the river to be inhabited by a number of nefarious characters, and the lodging houses in the district are well known to be the hiding places of criminals of all sorts and nationalities. There is plenty of money, however, spent in the region on Saturday night, and the shopkeepers of Widows' Row have for a long time enjoyed the right of erecting stalls outside their shops at week-ends to increase their trading capacity. The amount of money taken here in small sums is incredible, and there is no doubt that the gangsters' attack on Saturday night was planned with an intimate knowledge of the conditions. There are many circumstances in connection with the affair, however, which are not only astonishing, but, at the present time, utterly unexplained, and the whole law-abiding public of the metropolis is hoping that the police will tackle the problem before them with spirit and resolution."

"So far, as you see," the Sub-Commissioner interposed, covering the newspaper with his hand for a moment, "the whole thing seems straightforward and fair enough. These shopkeepers ran their own risk. They knew perfectly well that with a cash box out on the stalls and another in the shops behind, neither of which could be adequately guarded,

they were liable to attack at any time. It is an enterprise which would naturally commend itself to any band of thieves, and I imagine that the gang who are concerned in this are the fellows who have bothered us for so long, and whom so far we haven't been able to touch *en masse*. It is in its further development that the matter becomes a little more mysterious. Get on with it now, Milsom."

The detective continued to read.

"The most singular part of the whole affair has yet to be told. The gangsters, some of whom were gunmen, and many of whom carried knives, met from the first with very little resistance from the stall keepers. Suddenly, however, an attack was made upon them by what one can only conclude was another band of gangsters who were out upon the same errand. These lads seem to have been, for the most part at any rate, entirely unarmed, but they were none the less able to give a good account of themselves, and, although three appear to have been dangerously, and several others slightly wounded, there were at least a dozen of the armed gang who were later on taken to the hospital unconscious, and suffering from various injuries. Very few arrests, unfortunately, were made, and, with regard to the actual shootings, no competent witness has yet come forward. The whole affair was of brief duration, and was practically over by the time a sufficient body of police had arrived to deal with the disorder."

"You don't want the names of the wounded, I suppose, Chief?" Milsom observed, as he pushed the paper away. "That seems to be a very fair account of the proceedings in their initial stage."

"It doesn't lead us anywhere, does it?" Sub-Commissioner Marlowe pointed out glumly.

"It does not," his subordinate admitted. "I may have

seemed very stupid and uncommunicative during the last week, Chief, but I am now going to add a great deal to your knowledge of the whole affair, and you will understand then, I think, why I have kept every one possible out of court at the inquests and before the magistrates. There are two men, whose names I have marked on the charge sheet, who, although they don't know it, are practically under arrest. They haven't even been asked to give evidence. It isn't one man we want, or two, but a score, and, although it may seem that I have been rather slow about things, it's just possible that if we succeed on the lines I'm working on, we may bring in the whole of that gang who've been worrying us for so long, the Swan Alley murderers, and the murderer of the young woman in the Milan Court."

"Stout fellow, Milsom!" his Chief exclaimed, patting him on the shoulder. "You must confess that I have let you go your own way. I know you've been keeping a few things back, of course, but I haven't complained. I know you've done it with a motive."

A constable in undress uniform presented himself.

"A person named Talbot, sir," he announced. "Says he's come by appointment to see Inspector Milsom."

"Show him up," the Sub-Commissioner enjoined. "Sharpen your pencils, Joyce. This is where we all fancy that we're in New York."

## CHAPTER XXXII

The newcomer at the conference in Sub-Commissioner Marlowe's room disclosed himself as a somewhat sturdy individual, very nervous, with an honest but not particularly attractive expression. He carried his arm in a sling and walked with a slight limp. There was also a wound upon his cheek which had apparently only just commenced to heal. Milsom greeted him in friendly fashion and signalled the constable who had shown him in to offer him a chair.

"Come and sit down with us, Talbot," he invited. "I hope you're feeling better?"

"I'm a little groggy on the legs still, sir," the young man replied, "but I came along directly I got your message. If there's anything I can do to help get the master back, I shall be only too glad."

"You can help us best," Milsom confided, "by telling the Sub-Commissioner here, and myself, everything you know, however unimportant it may seem. You have been chauffeur to Lord Newberry, I understand, only a week or so?"

"That's all, sir."

"He took you from Abbs's Academy of Boxing down in Swan Alley where the murders were?"

"That's right. He didn't exactly sack the old chauffeur. He sent him down to the country on full pay. What he told me was that he needed a man with him all the time who was quick-witted and could use his fists."

Milsom nodded appreciatively.

"You've been a bit of a boxer, I should imagine?"

"I've held my own against most of my weight, sir," the man replied, trying to smooth back a very refractory head of hair. "I couldn't have stood up for five minutes with the governor, though. He was the quickest with his feet and hands at the weight I ever did see."

"Now I don't want to bother you unnecessarily," Milsom went on. "Let's come at once to last Saturday night. You were ordered out with the car at ten o'clock. Did you know where you were going?"

The man hesitated for a moment.

"I sort of had an idea there was going to be a scrap, sir," he admitted. "This here Lord Newberry warned me, when I took on the job, as he was planning for a fight with a gang who had done him dirt. I was ready enough. I left it for him to make the plans. Lord Newberry, he wouldn't let us carry guns or knives. I was there with my little duster, ready for anything."

"I see. But when half-past ten came, you didn't go straight down to Widows' Row."

"That's right, sir. We went to the Milan Court Hotel instead."

"Your master went in there, and you waited for him."

"Yes, sir."

"How long was he gone?"

"About a quarter of an hour, I think. Jacob, he was one of the footmen at the house — he came from the Academy too — he was on the box with me, and we were both getting nervy. We were afraid we should be too late for the scrap."

"You know now," Milsom reflected, "that when your master went upstairs at the Milan Court Hotel, he discovered that a terrible crime had been committed?"

"I read that in the newspapers, sir."

"Did he show any signs of it when he came down?"

"I never seen him look like he did before," the man replied. "He was walking stiff and firm when he crossed the pavement, but there was a glint of red in his eyes, and he seemed to me, sir — I don't know how to express it — like a man on fire inside."

There was a momentary pause. Perhaps the sunshine had departed with the breeze which was flowing in through the window. The shorthand writer shivered as he changed his pencil.

"He told you where to go?"

" 'Widows' Row,' he said. Then of course I knew that we were off for the scrap."

"And when you got there?"

"We pulled up at the corner of the street. We had scarcely stopped when I saw a young lad jump from behind a stall and throw a kind of black ball at the car. The next thing I remember was there seemed to be a thousand lightnings all round me, the car seemed to be splitting to pieces, and there was a great hole in the road."

"And after that?"

"I came to, with a glass of water in my hand and my back against a wall. There was some scrapping going on, but I think it was nearly over. They were putting what was left of poor Jacob in an ambulance."

"And what about your master?"

"I never seen him again, sir. I reckon he must have been either spirited away or blown to bits."

The Sub-Commissioner leaned back in his chair.

"A very nasty experience for you, Talbot," he remarked sympathetically. "So you didn't get into the fight at all?"

"I did not, sir," the man admitted. "I couldn't keep my joints still, I was shaking so. I just stayed where I was

until some policeman came along, and found that I wasn't hurt much, and sent me home."

There was a momentary silence. Detective Milsom, very suave, and almost indifferent in his tone, returned to his questioning.

"Tell us, Talbot," he begged, "I know you want to help — have you any knowledge of this gang you went out to fight?"

Then for the first time the man's tongue was not so ready. As though to gain time, he glanced round the large and lofty room, and from one to the other of its remaining occupants. Perhaps he was thinking of the two murdered men in the gymnasium.

"I don't know nothing, sir, not actually," he declared.

"But you have some sort of an idea, I expect," Milsom suggested good-humouredly.

"Well, I'll tell you what I do know, sir," the man decided, after a moment's hesitation. "I know that the master, before he came into his money and all that, had been one of that gang for a time. They let him down bad, and he got copped. When he came out, he didn't want to squeal. There's something as goes against the grain with all men as are men in that, but he wanted to get his own back. That's what we were out after that night."

"And you got the worst of it," the Sub-Commissioner commented, with a smile.

"Not so much the worst of it, after all, except for losing his lordship," the man objected. "Jacob and me would have made a difference if we hadn't been knocked out in that dirty way."

"You say 'losing,'" Milsom remarked, leaning over. "You don't really believe that Lord Newberry was blown to pieces, then?"

Talbot twiddled his cap in his hand for a moment. Then he brought out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. The room seemed to have become warmer again, and the sunshine was streaming in upon his face.

"Well, I never could bring my mind to believe that they meant to kill the boss outright," he confided. "I couldn't get that into my head, nohow."

"Why not?" the detective asked softly. "With all that he knew, your master had only to walk into this place, and that band of gangsters would have been smashed to pieces."

"Yes, but he wouldn't have done it, sir," the man insisted. "They knew him too well for that. It wasn't his squeal they were afraid of. What they had in their minds was that they didn't want to put him away until he'd handed over the Blue Diamond — some big jewel he'd got, that they fancied they had a share in."

The pencil of the shorthand writer slipped over the ruled sheets. Milsom stroked his chin.

"That's very interesting, Talbot," he observed. "What do you know about this jewel?"

"Not a single thing more, sir," Talbot affirmed earnestly. "That's just poor Jacob's tale, and he's gone to kingdom come, so it don't matter. He says to me — 'The governor's safe enough till they've got the Blue Diamond out of him.' I wish I could think that he's right."

"A good master, eh?"

"A man and a gentleman, sir. There ain't many like him."

"Talbot," the Sub-Commissioner asked, "are you sure that you know nothing about that other gang — the gang you were to fight with?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Think this out carefully, Talbot. If Lord Newberry

is still alive, he is probably in their hands. We want, naturally, to rescue him. Think, is there any way you can help us?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," was the reluctant admission.

"Your master never called at any odd places — places where he might have met some of them? He kept you round Bond Street and the clubs, eh?"

"There was once or twice we went in a contrary direction," the man acknowledged.

"As, for example?"

Talbot moved uneasily in his chair.

"I don't reckon I'm exactly a coward, sir," he said, "but I ain't too fond of talking of things that aren't my concern. If it was a question of a scrap to get the governor back, I'd be with you all the time, but them gangsters we were after last Saturday night, they're a damned funny lot. Unless I was dead sure it was going to do the governor a bit of good, I wouldn't say a thing that would give you a line on them. I can't get Sam West and that other poor chap out of my mind. I reckon they're dangerous. That's what I think of them."

"All the more reason why you should be frank," the Sub-Commissioner pointed out, "because I think we can take it for granted that if Lord Newberry is alive at all, he is in the hands of that gang."

"Well," Talbot confided, with a curious air of unwillingness, "the only place we went to twice which seemed to me to be a bit out of the way was the Lion and the Lamb down in Bermondsey. Regular public house it is, fronting the street. I took the governor there twice, and he came out laughing each time."

The Sub-Commissioner and Milsom exchanged swift glances. The former bent a little closer over his desk to hide the gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"You didn't see any one around the place that you knew by sight?" Milsom asked.

"I did not, sir," the man replied, "but, in for a penny in for a pound, I did see one thing which seemed to me somehow queer. The governor wasn't one to run about after the girls, but the second time he was there, I happened to glance up, and I saw at a window of a room on the first floor, right over the bar parlour, the most miraculous-looking woman I ever seen in my life, and when I read the description of the one as was done in at the Milan, where we drove to the night of the raid, I couldn't help thinking of her. So that's that," he wound up, rising to his feet. "I've told you gentlemen everything I know, and a good deal that's only ideas like at the back of my mind, and if it's agreeable to you both, I'll be going."

"We're very much obliged to you, I am sure," Milsom acknowledged, escorting his visitor to the door, his hand resting upon his arm in friendly fashion. "And do remember this. Nothing that you have told us, or could tell us in the future, will ever get you into any trouble."

The chauffeur and ex-pugilist took his leave. The Sub-Commissioner and his subordinate once more exchanged glances of understanding.

"We got what we wanted, I think, sir," the detective remarked.

"We did indeed," the Sub-Commissioner assented. "We have something to start on now, at any rate. You know all about our next friend, I suppose?"

"I have a fancy," Milsom confided, with a slight deepening of the lines at the corners of his mouth, "that if I knew all about him, I should know exactly where David Newberry is at the present moment."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

Once more the attendant policeman threw open the door.

"Mr. Reuben Grossett, by appointment, sir," he announced.

Reuben, very carefully dressed, carrying his hat in his hand, a grave but ingratiating smile upon his lips, was ushered in. The Sub-Commissioner acknowledged his greeting a little curtly. Milsom waved him to a chair.

"Very good of you to come, Mr. Grossett," he said. "Very kind of you, indeed, I am sure."

"Glad to do anything I can to oblige," Reuben remarked, as he sat down, pulled up his trousers a little, and crossed his legs. "At the same time, I really don't see what use I can be to you."

"There were just one or two questions," the Sub-Commissioner explained, "which you would have been asked, Mr. Grossett, at the inquest upon that unfortunate young woman, but Mr. Milsom here was very anxious that they should not be put in court. He thought if you could be induced to pay us a short visit, it would be more satisfactory."

"I thought they asked me a good many questions in court," Reuben said suspiciously.

"Not vital ones," the Sub-Commissioner pointed out; "not vital ones, Mr. Grossett. For instance, they didn't ask you, I think, why you wished to give a sleeping draught to that unfortunate young lady, Miss Belle Morgan. You

will probably prefer to tell us. It might have been an embarrassing question to put in court."

"My reason was simple enough," was the prompt reply. "I knew that she was very much attracted by David Newberry. She was my fiancée, and I preferred keeping her to myself. If I had not dropped that little tabloid into her glass in the Milan, she'd have danced with him all night, and God knows what else afterwards, and I should have been left alone."

"I see," the Sub-Commissioner murmured. "That sounds reasonable enough. Now, there is another thing I wanted to ask you, Mr. Grossett. Remember, you needn't answer these questions unless you like. This is all a friendly examination to find out if you can help us to get at the truth — but what we should like to know is, what were your movements after you left the Milan?"

"I went straight back to my rooms," Reuben confided — "near Cannon Street. I was there before two o'clock. Both my landlady and her husband saw me come in and locked up after me."

"Can't you tell us a little more about this young lady?" Detective Milsom urged.

"I wish I could. She was always very mysterious, even with me. She came to London just for a day or two now and then, and always let me know."

"You know nothing of her history then?"

"Nothing whatever."

There was a moment's silence. The reporter's pencil went on glibly. The Sub-Commissioner turned over some papers.

"Mr. Grossett," he said, "I am going to ask you one or two questions upon an entirely different subject. I hope your good nature will stand the strain."

Reuben moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"I don't see why it shouldn't," he answered. "There's nothing I know I'm ashamed to tell."

"Well, then, what do you know about a gang of criminals called the Lambs?"

The young man seemed to freeze up. He stared hard across at his questioner.

"Nothing at all," he replied. "Why should I?"

"Thought you might have heard of them," Milsom observed. "A good many people have. David Newberry was a member of the gang once."

"I know nothing of David Newberry," Reuben declared coldly.

"You were shocked to hear of his accident or disappearance, I am sure," the Sub-Commissioner suggested.

"I was shocked as every one else was," was the curt rejoinder. "I had no reason to feel differently from other people. He may be wandering about somewhere, even now. Loss of memory often follows these sort of affairs."

"Loss of memory!" Milsom speculated. "Yes, of course that might occur. Unlikely though, with such a well-balanced young man. . . . I am disappointed you can't tell us anything about the Lambs, Mr. Grossett."

"I wish I could," the young man replied suavely. "I simply don't know anything about them. They don't come into my scheme of life. My friends, I am glad to say, belong to a different grade of society."

"You're not an habitué of the Milan though, Mr. Grossett?"

"I am there pretty often."

"The manager does not seem to remember you," Milsom remarked. "Your name, for instance, does not appear in the list of those who habitually reserve tables in the restaurants."

Reuben sat up in his chair.

"What's all this about?" he demanded. "Mr. Milsom here asked me at the inquest to come up and see you and answer a few questions, and I was very glad to come, but what have you got in your heads about me? I don't understand what you're driving at."

"We hoped you might have been inclined to talk a little more freely to us here than you would have been in court," Milsom admitted. "We hear so many conflicting stories, you see. For instance, we have heard that you were seen at the Milan on the night the young lady was killed. Is that true?"

"I was nowhere near the place," Reuben declared vigorously.

The Sub-Commissioner glanced at the shorthand writer. The latter's pencil was busy for several moments.

"Very well, then," the Sub-Commissioner continued. "We are to understand that that is not true. Then we have heard in various quarters that a certain amount of mystery attaches itself to your life, since you gave up the study of the law. No one seems to know what you do in the daytime, but you are frequently out all night. Are you still engaged in an office, Mr. Grossett?"

Reuben dropped his hat and stooped to pick it up. He wiped his lips with an unfolded handkerchief.

"I am looking for a job," he answered.

"Been out of one long?"

"That's my business."

The Sub-Commissioner raised his eyebrows.

"Come, come, Mr. Grossett," he expostulated. "I thought that if we treated you in friendly fashion, you might be inclined to be more confidential."

"But what have these personal questions to do with any one except myself?" Reuben protested. "What is there for me to be confidential about?"

The Sub-Commissioner leaned forward across his desk. Something menacing seemed to have crept into his tone.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Grossett," he said. "I will put the matter as plainly as you like. These are the points upon which we need information from you. First of all, the whereabouts of David Newberry; secondly, the murderer of Miss Belle Morgan; thirdly, the head of the criminal organisation known as the Lambs."

"In plain words, you want me to — "

Reuben stopped short. A cold shiver ran through him. The Sub-Commissioner completed the sentence for him.

"Quite right, Mr. Reuben Grossett. We want you to squeal. You might just as well."

Reuben, although his tongue was as dry as dust in his mouth, and his temples were throbbing as though with the beating of red-hot anvils, made a supreme effort. He forgot his terrible slip, he pushed back the memory of it. He looked across the room at that merciless figure at the desk and he took up his rôle once more.

"I'm afraid," he regretted, "that I have wasted your time, and you have wasted mine. I am not the man you seem to think I am. I know nothing of any of these matters. If you will allow me — " he concluded, half rising to his feet.

"Don't hurry, Mr. Grossett; pray don't hurry," the Sub-Commissioner begged. "Much better for us to come to a little understanding together whilst you are here. Now, let me ask you this. Are you a great traveller?"

"I never leave England," Reuben replied.

"Then why," his questioner continued, "have you five trunks of perfectly new clothes — complete outfits, in fact — lying in the cloakroom at Cannon Street Station, labelled via London Bridge to Tilbury for embarkation on the

*Tolada* next Monday? Is the game up here? It that what it is?"

Reuben laughed with almost hysterical uneasiness.

"You've got me mixed up," he declared. "There's no luggage of mine at Cannon Street. I'm not thinking of leaving the country, and if I were, what business is it of anybody's? I'm not accused of anything, am I?"

Detective Milsom coughed.

"Certainly not, Mr. Grossett," he intervened. "Most certainly not, but there are one or two little matters we should like to have cleared up. For instance, Lord Newberry. You weren't on very good terms with him, were you?"

"I didn't know him," was the swift rejoinder.

"Not know him? But you were both in the same gang twelve months ago."

"What gang?"

The Sub-Commissioner smiled.

"The young man was brought up in a lawyer's office," he observed. "All the same, Reuben Grossett, it is our belief, from information we have received, that you could, if you would, tell us all about this gang. I suggest that it might make things easier for you."

"Might give you a better chance of moving those five trunks down to Tilbury," Milsom put in.

"You two gentlemen have an utterly wrong idea of how I spend my life and my time," Reuben insisted, with an attempt at dignity. "I think it is quite useless for me to stay here any longer."

"Oh, I don't think so," Milsom remonstrated. "We really are not so ill-informed as you seem to believe. This morning, for instance, you rose at one o'clock. Very late indeed for a young man of your age. You took some sort of a meal in the refreshment room at Cannon Street Station,

you visited your barber there, you sent a telephone message from the telephone booth, and then you took the underground up here. I think that's fairly correct, isn't it?"

"You're having me watched!" Reuben exclaimed.

"Yes, we're having you watched," the Sub-Commissioner acknowledged. "And you will be watched from now on until we discover what we want to know, unless you turn sensible and tell us the truth. Come on, young man, out with it! There's two thousand pounds' reward for the Swan Alley murder; there's five hundred pounds' reward for the Milan Court murder. Tell us all about this precious gang, and indirectly you may earn both."

"You may as well," Milsom said persuasively. "You won't be able to join up with them again. You'll simply lead us to them if you try to go near their haunts. You're cut off from them, anyway. Come on! Let's have the whole story."

Through sheer terror, Reuben was goaded into the effort of his life. There was surprise and mild offence in his rejoinder.

"If you've been following me about, you've lost your time," he declared. "I know nothing about gangs. I'm a bit of a slacker, I admit, since I came into my money, but what have the police got to do with that?"

"Chuck it, Grossett," Milsom enjoined sharply. "Tell us how long it is since you were at the Lion and the Lamb in Bermondsey?"

Reuben's collapse seemed imminent. The Sub-Commissioner and Milsom exchanged a quick glance of satisfaction. Reuben's ever-shifting eyes intercepted it. After all then, perhaps they were bluffing.

"Look here," he complained, "I don't understand this. You've got me here, you say, to ask a few simple questions

which you didn't wish to ask at the inquest because you wanted them kept out of the papers. I came all right, didn't I? Now you're asking me a string of things which have nothing to do with me. You tell me you've had me watched. You're trying even to threaten me. I've nothing to tell you. I met the young woman Belle by accident, and if she belonged to any gang I never knew it. As for David Newberry, I never spoke to him in my life until that night at the Milan. I've had enough of this."

A bell rang on the Sub-Commissioner's desk. He picked up a small receiver, muttered a word or two, and handed it over to Milsom. Milsom listened with a slightly bored expression.

"Send him up," he directed.

"I'm going," Reuben announced. "I'm sick of your questioning. You don't believe anything I say. The stiffs can follow me and see how much they can find out."

"One moment, Mr. Grossett," Milsom begged. "You haven't altogether understood us. We've been going for big things with you. We've got enough of the little ones to keep you busy for a time. We can't have you leave us like this. Besides," he added, listening to the approaching footsteps, "you may be interested in meeting an old friend."

There was a knock at the door. Once more the policeman presented himself. He made no announcement, no name had passed. Leaning heavily upon his stick, Tottie Green made his entrance.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

It was a strange and, to both the Sub-Commissioner and Milsom, an utterly unexpected drama which was played out before their eyes. Reuben stood swaying for a moment upon his feet. His eyes seemed to search everywhere for some other exit, for some means of escape. Then, with a ghastly little cry, he collapsed into his place. Tottie Green stumped along, a figure of fate. He was dressed in deep black, but his clothes were already dusty and smeared with tobacco ash. His waistcoat buttons were undone, his breathing could be heard at the other end of the room. Yet about his thick mouth there was a new and vicious strength; his watery eyes gleamed.

"Mr. — what name did you say?" the Sub-Commissioner enquired.

"Tottie Green," the newcomer answered. "That lad in the chair is my Chief of the Staff. I'm the head of the gang, you're hunting, who've got Dave Newberry. Now I can't stand. I brought all you want. Give me a chair. What's that chap there with a pencil? A shorthand clerk? See that he takes down all I say. I'm here to make sure that that vermin there hangs."

There was a breathless little pause. Milsom, with firm hands, helped Tottie Green to ensconce himself.

"I've got to smoke," the latter insisted. "I always said I'd go out smoking and I got to. You can spare all the cigars in the world when you hear what I'm going to say. Come on! Something strong."

The Sub-Commissioner fumbled in his drawers and pro-

duced some fine Havanas. Tottie Green selected the blackest and lit it.

"I got my own private doctor," he confided, as he blew out a cloud of cigar smoke. "He's told me for the last year or so that I'm hanging on between life and death. That being the case, I won't beat about the bush. I want to make sure of him."

His stubby, unclean forefinger stabbed the air towards where Reuben was cowering.

"He's a bloody murderer," Tottie Green went on. "Take down that, young man with the pencil. He's murdered at my orders before now. I've been behind him. He murdered Dick Ebben of Swan Alley — and served the skunk right. He was squealing. He did in Dave Houlden in the Milan Hotel five years ago. That don't matter, either. What he's got to swing for is this last job. He killed — Belle — Belle — that I've looked after all these years — a woman and my pal Morgan's daughter — the chap you sent to penal servitude — killed her because she'd fallen for Dave Newberry."

He paused and except for the sound of his frantic breathing and the scraping of the reporter's pencil, there was silence in the room. Reuben tried to raise himself, clutching at the back of the chair. He turned a white face to his accuser.

"You're lying, Tottie Green," he shouted. "It was nothing to do with Dave Newberry, though I hated her for it. She squealed, I tell you. I was hiding in her room and I heard her telephone. She squealed — to Dave — that the lads were bringing their guns and knives, and coming strong. I tell you I heard her. What do we do to squealers? She got what was coming to her. She got — "

He broke off. Suddenly his cry rang through the office. It was like the hysterical shriek of a woman who

has suddenly lifted a cloth and seen something terrible.

"You devils!" he yelled. "You fiends! You carcass from hell, Tottie! You've made me talk, and I'd kept my lips shut. They'd got nothing from me. Oh, hell!"

He stood there shivering until his knees collapsed, and he cowered in the chair again. Tottie Green's waistcoat began to heave. He was laughing. He turned to the Sub-Commissioner.

"Say, Mr. Policeman," he appealed, "what do you think of that? You heard what he said? He confessed, all right, didn't he? He gets into the Milan when he likes through the waiters' staff. You heard, didn't you? That chap with a pencil, he's got it down. Reuben will swing for that, eh? Tell me he'll swing — because I might go out myself at any minute, and I want to be sure."

There was a horrible flush on Tottie Green's face, but he still gripped his cigar so that the outer leaves were broken.

"He'll swing, all right," the Sub-Commissioner assured him. "Now, listen. Do you mean to tell us that you are at the head of this gang who were fighting in Widows' Row — the gang to which David Newberry belonged — the gang — "

"Chuck it!" Tottie Green interrupted. "You've got a fool lot of stiffs, or they'd have tumbled to me before now. I'm Tottie Green, and I've been head of the Lambs for fourteen years — a small job at first, but the biggest in Europe up till to-day. They'll get hell now. I've signed the warrants for seven men to get theirs for squealing, and they've had it. You'll find their graves in Highgate Cemetery. They've had it, all right, with their faces up to the stars and the knives tickling in their hearts. My death warrant has been as good as any king's that ever sat on the throne. Yes, I'm a murderer a good many times over,

but I've only murdered squealers. I've had 'em every time. But, my Gawd, listen! Here's the great joke! I'm the squealer myself now! I end my life with a squeal. I break the gang with a squeal. And because of that bloody piece of foul flesh, that cowardly louse over there! Wait!"

He drew a flask from his pocket. No one stopped him. He took long, gurgling, sobbing gulps. When he had finished, the flask slipped from his fingers and lay upon the dark green carpet. A thin stream of liquid made its curving way towards the walls. No one noticed. The Sub-Commissioner was tearing a piece of blotting paper to pieces; Milsom was gripping the side of his desk until his fingers ached.

"Now, then! On with the pencil! Take it down, quick! Number 11a Riverside Row, Tooley Street way, in the downstair room. That's been our headquarters for seven years. They'll give you a show, I can promise you. There's a back way out, and bombs, and there'll be a few stiffs' widows before you gather them in, but that's where they are. Headquarters — the Lion and the Lamb, Bermondsey. You'll find some cunning little devices there for getting in and out. That's where I sat and planned. That's where I signed death warrants. And listen. Dave weren't a bad sort. If you're quick, he may be alive. Number 15a Mortimer Place, Camberwell, respectable Nursing Home, nice matron, nurses all swell — I paid anything you like for their uniform. A doctor on the premises, an Armenian Jew, clever as paint — torturer, anything you like. There's Lem there too, getting over the wounds he got when Dave winged him in Swan Alley. He was the other chap in that. He gave Sam West his. I was behind it, though. I signed his warrant. Gawd, is there anything left in that flask?"

He leaned down but failed to reach it. Milsom, scarcely knowing what he did, steadied him with one hand and picked

the flask up with the other. There was still a little liquor left. He handed the flask to Tottie Green, who raised it to his lips and drank.

"My last drink!" he muttered. "I've got to act quick, because I've poison inside me, and it's working. Now, then! Anything else you want to know?"

The Sub-Commissioner found words.

"Is this amazing story of yours the truth?" he demanded.

"Every word of it," Tottie Green swore. "I'd have gone on too. I'd have fought you chaps but for him. There was only one thing meant anything to me in life. He knew it. It was Belle — the most beautiful creature that ever lived. He knew it, the skunk. If she squealed, she squealed. I'd have forgiven her. He killed her because of Dave. If Dave's still alive, if she'd been here, I'd have given her to him."

Milsom came to himself. He was at the telephone.

"Two police vans. The flying squad. Men armed — five minutes! Coming myself — Milsom. Got that?"

He turned away.

"I want to save Newberry," he explained.

The Sub-Commissioner rang the bell. Tottie Green gave a great groan. He fell forward. His lips twitched. As the Sub-Commissioner bent over him, he half opened his eyes for a minute. His trembling forefinger stole out towards the unconscious figure of Reuben, sprawled across the chair.

"He swings, mind — he swings!" he muttered. "I've squealed for that!"

## CHAPTER XXXV

Doctor Erasmus Nadol, secretary and resident physician to Miss Mason's private Nursing Home in Mortimer Place, sat at the desk in his consulting room, with a pile of accounts before him, with which he had no sort of inclination to deal. He was a thin-featured, delicate-looking little man, with a stoop so pronounced that it amounted almost to a deformity. His features were good, although his nose was slightly too curved and his lips a shade too red. His high forehead was distinctly intellectual. His hands were the hands of a woman, fine and delicate. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and few people would have mistaken him for anything but what he was — a very clever man.

A knock at the door interrupted his reflections. In response to the doctor's invitation to enter, Cannon Ball Lem, leaning heavily upon a stick and looking little more than the ghost of his former self, hobbled in.

"What are you doing down here?" the doctor demanded. "It isn't your time for treatment yet."

"Blast your treatment!" Lem muttered, staggering into a chair. "Why don't I get better? That's what I want to know?"

"Because you drink a bottle of whisky a day and lie about it," was the chilly retort. "You undo all the good my medicines could do you. You are drinking yourself into the grave. No doctor can help a self-indulgent tank like you, who hasn't the courage to keep off the drink even for a week or two."

"If I didn't take a drink now and then," Lem growled, "I should go out right away."

"You'll do that, as it is," the doctor assured him. "What do you want?"

"I want to know, first of all, if there's any news. What about my lord upstairs?"

"No progress in that direction, I fear," Doctor Nadol regretted. "The young man appears to be possessed of what you lack — courage and an infinite capacity for bearing pain. His nerves, too, take a lot of breaking. Open the door for a minute and listen to that."

Lem leaned over and did as he was bidden. From a room upstairs came the shrieks and sobs of a tortured being, growing and fading as though with the intensity of the pain, ending in one long wail of despair. Even Lem shivered.

"What the devil's that, Doc?" he asked.

"Never mind. Something of that sort has been in his ears day and night. He never knows when he isn't going to hear those cries of agony, and he's made no remark since the first day. He just asked Nurse Angus who was being tortured. She told him that it was an operation, and we didn't give anæsthetics here. He simply turned over."

"Have you had him in the theatre?"

"Twice. He's due to go in to-day for the third time."

"Look here," Lem said gruffly, "we want that diamond or the money like hell, but it ain't safe to keep him. Put him out, Doc. Put him out to-day. Give him the last screw, and if he won't hand over, finish with him. I dunno, but I've got a queer feeling about things. Reuben was coming last night. He never come near. He ain't telephoned to-day. What's wrong?"

The doctor looked at him keenly.

"To tell you the truth, Lem," he confided, "when you

came in, I was asking myself the same question. I can't get any message through to the Lion and the Lamb. I wanted Tottie Green's last word — about him," he added, jerking his head upwards. "I've rung up on our private telephone into the parlour six times. No reply. There should be Tottie Green there, and Fishy Tim, and Reuben. I've just sent a messenger round."

"The old man will go dotty about that," Lem observed.

"Possibly," Doctor Nadol replied, leaning back and pressing the tips of his forefingers together, "but if I hadn't, I think I should have gone dotty myself. You are too clumsily made a creature to know what nerves are, Lem. I, on the other hand, am a bundle of them. There is trouble about, Lem. Something has gone wrong."

"After all, what the hell can have gone wrong?" Lem demanded. "We've got Dave. Nearly every one believes he was blown into bits when that bomb went off. There hasn't been a hint in a single paper that he may have tumbled into any other sort of trouble. The police admitted only yesterday that they had no sort of a line on the armed gang. No trouble at the Lion and the Lamb. No trouble at Riverside Row. Jim Bordon was here last night. What's worrying you?"

The doctor pushed the papers on one side and glanced at his watch.

"If you'll tell me what time you're putting the screw on Dave," Lem continued, "I'm coming in to watch."

"The more fool you," the doctor retorted. "Last time I gave him more than I've ever known a man to bear in my life. If he sees you sitting there, he'll never utter a sound."

"I'm coming, all right," Lem declared sullenly. "It's the only fun I get. Who the hell's this?"

There was a quick knock at the door. A woman, well and precisely dressed in official black, entered. With her,

almost supported in her arms, was a young woman obviously on the point of collapse. Her cheeks were ghastly pale, she was shivering. Her eyes were distended as though with fright.

"What is this, Miss Mason?" Doctor Nadol enquired.

"I was sent for by Nurse Susan," the matron explained. "She says that the front doorbell rang, and she found this young lady lying on the doorstep in what seems to have been a faint. I think she's off again now."

The doctor left his place. He came over and helped carry the girl to a couch. She lay there groaning. He made a brief examination.

"Healthy enough," he observed, standing back. "Taken something that disagreed with her, I should think."

"I've taken poison," the girl faltered, and closed her eyes again.

The doctor turned frowning towards the matron.

"This is a very bad time," he admonished her severely, "to let strangers into the Home. Why did you bring her in?"

"How could I leave her there?" the matron rejoined. "The first policeman who came along, or any people who passed and saw her fainting and knew that this was a Nursing Home would have brought her in. We could not have refused when they know that there's a doctor on the premises. You might have had to answer some enquiries. Certainly there would have been a terrible fuss."

"You're quite right, Matron," the doctor admitted. "We don't want her here, though."

"I ain't so sure," Lem intervened, leaning forward with a leer.

The doctor turned his head and frowned.

"We're not looking for that sort of trouble, Lem," he said acidly. "You get back to your room."

The girl opened her eyes.

"Let me have a room for just twelve hours," she begged. "I've been silly. I'll go away then, if I'm better. I can pay — pay anything you like. There's a purse in my bag there. Ten pounds if you want — anything. I'm not poor. It isn't that."

"What is your name?" the doctor enquired.

"Crawford — Mary Crawford."

"And your address?"

She shook her head.

"I sha'n't tell you that," she said. "I've run away from home. Perhaps I shall go back, but I sha'n't tell you my address."

"Take her up to Number 10," the doctor directed the matron. "Take off her outer clothes and give her a dressing gown until we make up our minds whether to keep her or not. Remove her shoes and stockings and give her a hot-water bottle. If she wants to be ill, let her."

The matron led the girl away. Almost immediately afterwards the telephone bell rang. The doctor listened with immovable face, uttered a few monosyllables, and rang off.

"Anything wrong?" Lem asked.

"Probably a great deal," the doctor replied. "Everything to us seems to be as usual, but evidently at headquarters there is another feeling. How long is it since Tottie Green left the parlour of the Lion and the Lamb?"

"Once within my memory," Lem answered. "That is when he came down to the lads at Riverside Row."

"He has gone out this morning," the doctor announced. "He has left no message. No one knows where. Reuben has not been near the place. That is the report of the messenger I sent down."

Even Lem showed signs of uneasiness.

"Perhaps he's coming here to see Dave himself," he suggested.

"Did you ever know Tottie Green to play a fool trick like that?" the doctor asked. "The one reason the gang have lived and flourished is because of Tottie Green's brains. Once in his lifetime he has visited Riverside Row and the lads. Never in his lifetime has he crossed the threshold of this place. Do you suppose he would break through all his habits of caution just now, when all Scotland Yard is combing London. There's something wrong, my friend."

He stretched out his hand and took up a time-table.

"Look here," Lem protested, "you ain't going to sheer off and leave me here, and Dave — leave the job half undone. You've got to put Dave out before you go. I'm a broken man and a cripple, but I'll see to that, Doctor, and don't you forget it."

The doctor was busy clearing out the very bulky contents of a cash box. When he had finished he turned to his companion.

"You can go and fetch Morrison and Smith and tell them to come to me in David Newberry's room. You can tell the matron to have the theatre prepared. Make yourself useful as long as you are hobbling about. As to my dealing with David Newberry, I have my instructions from Tottie Green, confirmed by Reuben. I shall not alter them to please you."

Lem's great hand twitched. He clenched his fist and unclenched it. The doctor looked at him with a queer and evil glance.

"A lump of brawn such as you are, even if you were in fighting trim," he said scornfully, "would be a mass of butter in my hands. I have half a dozen needles in my pocket, if it interests you to know it, a scratch with any

one of which would take you off in less than a minute. I learned early in life, when I knew that I was going to be small and delicate, and that I was going to lead a life of adventure, to find the means of life or death quicker than your clumsy methods. Be off. I still have five minutes' work to do here."

Lem shambled away. There was little to be seen of his vaunted courage.

Doctor Erasmus Nadol was most conscientious and precise in the discharge of his regular professional duties. In the front part of the Nursing Home there were a certain number of rooms, well-aired and ventilated, cheerful and clean, which were occupied at the present moment by victims of the recent raid. He visited these in turn, and no one could have told from his manner the inward disturbance from which he was suffering. He studied each case and treated it with skill. When he had finished, he passed down a corridor through a green baize portière, unlocked a dark oak door with a key which was attached to his chain, and passed into a very different region. Here, conditions were neither cheerful nor bright. The rooms, into two of which he looked, were small, ill-furnished and ill-ventilated. In one of them, a nurse of sinister appearance was bending over a truckle bed with iron supports. The doctor closed the door carefully behind him and entered.

"How is our patient?" he enquired with gentle sarcasm.

David turned his head slightly upon the pillow. There were black rings under his eyes and lines of suffering in his face. He made no reply.

"A little restless, sir," the nurse reported. "He complained of the massage this morning and keeps asking for food."

Doctor Nadol shook his head.

"Dear me!" he said. "Very unreasonable! Both my men are wonderful masseurs, a little rough perhaps, but without a doubt skilful. And as for food! Food in your present condition, my dear Lord Newberry, would be as bad as drink. Either would kill you. What I think I shall prescribe this morning is an hour in the theatre instead of half an hour. Dear me, dear me, how distressing!"

From the other side of a door at the farther end of the room, came a low cry of terror, followed by a broken sob and a shriek of pain, a torrent of hysterical prayer, moans, and finally a silence which seemed like the silence of death. David turned away that the doctor might not see his face. Even his limbs were twitching with horror.

"I was afraid," the doctor remarked, "that that young woman would give us trouble. I must let them know in the theatre that we shall be requiring it for a session."

He crossed the floor and opened a farther door. There was a brief view of what seemed like the operating room in a small hospital. Two men were moving a table and dragging out a strange-looking instrument from the wall.

"When you are ready, Smith," the doctor enjoined, "come and unfasten our patient. He complains that your massage has not been vigorous enough. You must do better to-morrow morning."

The man turned away with a grin.

"He got his all right this morning, sir," he said. "He don't want another like it."

The little doctor returned to David's bedside. He waved to the nurse.

"Leave us for a few minutes," he directed.

She left the room — a large woman, with a fat, cruel-looking face. She had listened to the groaning without a tremor. She never even glanced towards her patient as she went. The doctor sat on the edge of the bed.

"Lord Newberry," he began, "the time should have come by now when you must realise that you are utterly and completely in our hands. What you have been through already is nothing to what we can do. I have a needle in my pocket, for instance, with which if I were to give you one little jab, you would develop a disease not talked about in European society, but which would make you pray for death every minute. You see, with us, it is not necessary to kill. We can deal with our patients so that we have simply to give them the chance, and they are only too anxious to kill themselves."

David listened, motionless. His eyes were fixed upon the ceiling. He said nothing.

"I am now about to offer you," the doctor continued, "a great and wonderful chance. My position here is not without its scientific interest, but I should like a change. I have been offered a great post at Stamboul. If I could afford to, I should like to take it. With twenty thousand pounds more savings I could do so. Now, you are an obstinate man, and you have sworn that you will not give up the Blue Diamond. You have gone through a great deal of suffering rather than give it up. We will speak no more of the Blue Diamond. Would you care to buy your liberty at this moment for twenty thousand pounds?"

David moistened his lips with his tongue. This time he slightly turned his head towards the side of the bed.

"Just consider," the doctor went on, in his meek, quiet voice. "It is now, I believe, something like three o'clock. By early this evening, you would be taking a warm bath in your own house, aided by your servants, could order such refreshments as appealed to you. You could dine amidst the luxuries to which you are accustomed. It's worth considering. Don't you think, perhaps, that it is better than what lies before you at the other side of that door?"

This time David did not turn his head. He lay quite still.

"It could all be made very simple," Doctor Erasmus Nadol proceeded, taking off his gold spectacles for a moment and polishing them with a perfumed cambric handkerchief. "I have cheque forms here of all the banks in London. I should type a private letter to your bank manager which you would sign, asking him to honour the cheque, in case your balance had not reached my figures. I should send letter and cheque by a special messenger. One hour after the messenger had returned, your clothes would be restored to you, a taxicab summoned, and with the slight condition of silence which we would impose upon your honour, you would be a free man."

David broke his long silence. After all, the sound of his own voice was something.

"And you would be twenty thousand pounds richer," he said. "What about the gang?"

The doctor coughed.

"This," he admitted, "would be a private enterprise."

"Well," David pronounced, trying in vain to raise himself a little in the bed, "my answer to you is exactly the same as when you bullied me for the Blue Diamond — which I haven't got. I may die in this place — I probably shall — but not one penny the better off shall one of you blackguards be for this foul business. You can go on torturing me. I can bear pain. When I can bear no more, I shall die. A lot of good that may do you. You'll be found out, and I hope to God you'll swing for it. But if you think I'm going to buy my way to liberty, you're wrong. I may be free to-night or to-morrow morning. I think it's almost time my friends found me. When they come, there will be a great deal of trouble."

The doctor replaced his spectacles.

"I can remember," he confided, "only one other case of obstinacy such as yours. The patient then relented when he was dying in agony. He was too late. I trust that it may not be so with you."

He touched a bell. The two men who had been in the theatre entered.

"Take him in," the doctor enjoined. "We are going to have a little longer to-day."

They advanced to the bed, standing one on each side of David, and drew off the bedclothes. One saw then why he had remained so motionless. Two pillars of iron came through the mattress with circles of steel at the top, in each of which one of his ankles was clamped. A similar arrangement held his arms. Movement of more than an inch or two was impossible. They unscrewed the clamps.

"Steady," the doctor advised. "Let the blood run for a minute. Move your legs about, Newberry, and your arms. That's right. Walk round the room if you like. You can do no harm."

"I might put my foot on you," David threatened.

The doctor shook his head.

"You wouldn't do that," he remonstrated. "I'm your best friend, if you only knew it. Besides, as you remarked just now, you may be rescued by your friends at any moment. If they find you at all, it would be better for them to find you alive. . . . Capital! I congratulate you! You must have the constitution, my dear Lord Newberry, of an ox. What you should be able to get out of life! I find it hard to believe in such obstinacy. This way now, please. Everything ready, Smith?"

"Everything, Doctor."

"This way, if — "

The doctor broke off in his suave speech. The male nurses stood as though they were rooted to the ground.

Simultaneously two utterly different sounds, both of them close at hand, broke the chill silence of these ghostly rooms. The first was a girl's cry, a piercing cry of terror, the cry for help of one in pitiful straits. Sometimes triumphing over it, sometimes a thrilling background, pealed out the harsh, warning summons of an electric alarm bell. . . .

Doctor Erasmus Nadol heard both, but he listened only to the latter, and he knew that all those vague fears of his, derived from that psychic sense of which he honestly believed himself possessed, were justified. He knew that that bell, used never before since its installation, was pealing out the end of those evil days of crime and foul doing. The two men were stupefied with fear. They watched David draw himself up, watched the light of hope flash back into his eyes, watched him spring for the door, without an attempt to check him. Their senses were numb. They, too, knew.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

The girl released herself from the encircling arm of the nurse who had aided her upstairs, sat down on the edge of the bed, and looked round the room into which she had been shown with a little grimace.

"I don't think I want to stay here very long," she confided. "If I could rest for half an hour, and see some one."

"Whom do you want to see?" the nurse asked.

"The manager. Some one in authority."

"The doctor downstairs is the secretary. Then there is the matron. She has nothing to do but obey orders, though. What do you want?"

The girl hesitated.

"Perhaps I had better talk to the doctor when he comes around," she decided.

The nurse began to finger her clothes. The girl drew quickly away.

"Don't do that, please," she begged. "I don't wish to undress."

"You will take your shoes and stockings off," the nurse directed, "and also your frock. Then you can put that dressing gown on, and lie still whilst I fetch you a hot-water bottle."

Sophy wavered for a moment, but finally, with a little shrug of the shoulders, obeyed orders. She looked at the bed, however, with distaste.

"I don't think much of your linen," she remarked.

"It's good enough for those as sleep here, as a rule," was the blunt response.

"That sounds rather rude," Sophy observed. "Are you a certified nurse?"

The woman laughed — a shrill, unpleasant laugh.

"Oh, we're all certified here," she declared, "but we don't let our patients get too forward. Lie down whilst I get your hot-water bottle."

Sophy lay down with every appearance of fatigue. As soon as the door was closed, however, she sat up. Suddenly, through the chinks of the door at the foot of her bed, came a scream of pain, a cry, sobs of agony, a low undercurrent of moans. It was as though some one were going through the tortures of the damned. Sophy called out, beat her hands against the side of the bed, stuffed her fingers in her ears. She ran to the door, but lacked the courage to open it, and flew to the bell. She was pressing it desperately when the nurse returned with the hot-water bottle.

"What's that?" she cried. "Who is that? Is any one dying?"

The nurse pushed her back on to the bed and arranged the hot-water bottle against her feet.

"Don't be a fool," she admonished. "It's only a small operation. We have them every hour or so here."

"But pain like that!" Sophy cried out. "Don't you give them anæsthetics?"

"Not very often," was the cool reply. "Our surgeon doesn't believe in anæsthetics if they can be avoided."

"The brute!"

"This isn't a house of pleasure," the nurse sneered. "You chose to come here. You may find out what it's like before you go."

She reached the door. Sophy called her back.

"Look here," she said, "I feel better already. I didn't take enough poison to do more than make me feel ill. I'm getting better quickly. I want the doctor. I want to speak

to some one here who is responsible. Let me look at you."

The nurse returned her questioning gaze, and Sophy knew that it was an evil face. Nevertheless, in desperation she made an effort.

"I want you to do me a kindness," she ventured. "Not for nothing, of course! I can pay. I've plenty of money."

"What do you want?" the nurse asked.

"I want to know if there's a patient here named Newberry — David Newberry?"

"And what if there is?"

"I want to speak to him. There's fifty pounds in my bag there. Any one can have that if I can speak to David Newberry."

The nurse went calmly over to the bag, took out a roll of notes, and thrust them into her pocket.

"I'll see what I can do about it," she promised, and departed.

Sophy flung the hot-water bottle away and hurried on her shoes and stockings.

"They've got David," she kept on saying to herself. "They've got David here. It's a bad place. I'm sure it's bad. If only I can get away."

Her dress was half on when the door opened. Lem presented himself — Lem almost at his worst, brutal-looking, still unshaved, reeking with the fumes of the whisky he drank hour by hour. He looked across at Sophy, and he grinned. Then he closed the door behind him.

"This looks like a bit of all right," he remarked. "Come and sit down and chat a little with me, young lady. We're fellow patients, eh? Well, you're looking better. I'm not the man I was, but I'm feeling better myself. Come and sit down."

He patted the bed. She shrank shivering away.

"Come!" he hiccoughed. "None of your haughtiness!

This place is all right, I tell you. I'm one of the owners. If I tell the nurses to clear out, they clear out. I took a fancy to you when you came into the office. Come along."

He lurched to his feet and advanced across the room towards her. Perhaps for the first time in her life, Sophy knew fear. Everything that was ugly and vicious there, coming nearer every minute — the red light in the eyes, the sensuous parting of the lips. She laid her fingers upon the bell and screamed. Somewhere there seemed to be another bell ringing. She screamed louder still.

"Blast you! Drop that!" Lem muttered savagely. "Not that it will do you any good. I'm boss here. They'll do what I say. I'm going to lock the door and teach you to behave yourself."

He bent over the key and turned it. Then he staggered towards her with a grin of triumph.

"Shriek the place down — shriek the bloody place down, if you like," he jeered. "It won't do you any good here."

Once more her cry of agony rang through the place. Another door, leading from the room into the theatre, was suddenly thrown open. One of the strangest figures imaginable reeled into the room — to Sophy, a heaven-sent, amazing figure. She sprang towards him.

"David!" she cried, "Thank God, you're alive! This man, he's locked the door! Oh, how ill you look! What have they done to you, dear!"

Lem made turgid but triumphant progress towards them. The vicious light of hate blazed in his eyes. There was bestiality in his grin. David for one moment swayed upon his feet. He half closed his eyes, as though in prayer. It was a lie to imagine that he was weak, folly to think that his knees were trembling! He drew a long breath. Very gently he pushed Sophy on one side. Lem's leer of anticipation became more marked. The disturbing sound

of that other bell was forgotten. Here was the man he hated, at his mercy. He half rolled, half sprang towards him. . . .

David himself never really knew how it happened, what opening he used, what feint he employed, what he did with his feet. He only knew that for one moment, as though he had breathed Samson's immortal prayer to some listening deity, strength seemed to flow back into his body — a wild, strange moment, with a singing in his ears, and throbbing in his heart. He felt the breath of Lem's whisky almost in his nostrils, the actual pain to his knuckles as they crashed into the other man's face. A moment's sickness! A moment's triumph! A moment's brutality! Then he found Sophy pulling at his rude brown dressing gown.

"You've killed him, David! Let him be! Oh, David!"

She was sobbing in his arms — for the first time in her life hysterical. David was leaning against the foot of the bed, looking at the senseless heap upon the floor. The bell was ringing louder and louder. Suddenly it stopped. There were voices now in the distance. David felt his knees crumbling.

"Sophy! Sophy!" he gasped. "Help me, quick."

She held him up. He reached a chair and sank into it. The tears streamed down her cheeks as she saw the lines in his face, the black rings under his eyes, suddenly realised that he was gaunt, like a man in some terrible fever.

"Sophy," he faltered, "you've come here — for me — to this ghastly hell."

"I found the diamond," she cried. "I have brought it with me."

"What do you mean?"

"I made myself very nice to Lady Frankley," she went on. "She asked me down for the day. Whilst she was asleep in the afternoon, I went through those rooms again.

I can't tell you what made me think of it, David, but at the first corner you passed, on the top of the bookcases, there is a big china bowl filled with dried rose leaves."

A curious wave of reminiscence flashed into his face.

"Child," he exclaimed, "that's where I put it. I caught up a great handful of the leaves, dropped it in, and put them back again."

She nodded.

"They looked as though they hadn't been disturbed for centuries," she said. "It was there, almost at the bottom."

He held his forehead for a minute.

"You found the diamond, yes," he muttered, "but how did you find out this poisonous place, Sophy?"

"I had a strange note," she confided. "A waiter from the Milan brought it. It wasn't signed, but I know who it was from. It was from that beautiful woman who was murdered there. Just a few words scrawled across the paper, giving me this address, and saying that if I offered them the diamond here, they'd give you up."

"But to bring it yourself! This place!"

"I daren't give it to the police," she interrupted. "You wouldn't go yourself, and I was afraid you'd be angry if I did. I came here and pretended to faint. What a fool I was! David, shall we ever get away?"

There was a thundering knock at the door. Neither of them had the strength to get up and turn the key.

"It's that terrible doctor!" she sobbed. "David, what a fool I've been!"

"Open the door," some one called from outside.

"Who are you?" David demanded.

"The police. Open in the name of the law."

They looked at one another.

"Milsom's found us," David cried. "Can you open the door, Sophy? I can't stand up."

She turned the key and stood away just in time, for the lower panels were shattered by a terrific blow, and the lock and everything parted. Through the débris plunged two large, kind-looking men, and after them a sandy-haired, freckled little person who almost tumbled over Lem's prostrate body.

"Thank God, we're in time!" he exclaimed, holding out his hands.

Revolver shots rang out from below. They heard them unmoved. David half rose.

"I'd get down," he faltered, "but I'm done. I'm through with fighting for to-day. I think I've killed that carrion."

Milsom produced a flask and forced it between his lips.

"Don't you worry," he begged. "You've only saved him from the gallows, if you have. They need no help downstairs. We've relays of men in reserve. . . . Oh, David, Lord Newberry, why wouldn't you open your mouth to us!"

"I was a damned fool," David groaned. "Tell me, who did give them away in the end?"

The detective came as near a smile as the conditions permitted.

"Tottie Green," he confided.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

Six o'clock chimed. Sophy, with a great sigh of relief, leaned forward and pressed the bell. Dowson, whose entrance was almost unexpectedly prompt, required no orders. He entered, carrying a cocktail shaker and followed by a footman with glasses and many bottles upon a tray.

"I took the liberty, my lord, of bringing the larger shaker," he said, "it being your first evening down."

"After the story I've been listening to," the Marquis remarked, "I could drink cocktails out of a bucket. Don't forget the gin, Dowson," he enjoined. "Let me have something to bring my feet down to earth again."

Dowson threw himself into his task as he had never done before. Even the glasses when he brought them round were of a larger size than usual. His bow as he handed the tray to Sophy was almost reverential. The latter was leaning back in her accustomed chair. The excitement of their joint narration had brought a new light into her eyes. David, notwithstanding his illness, seemed younger. The lines had gone from his face. He took Sophy's hand as he raised his glass to his lips.

"God bless you both!" Glendower invoked fervently. "After all you've gone through, I'm bringing the shaker round the next time. I'm only a lad of sixty-six, and never yet has anything happened to me like that. Now for a few more questions, if you don't mind."

"The period of strain is past," David confided. "I can

piece the whole thing together now. I think I can answer anything you want to know."

"Cigarettes, please," Sophie begged. . . . "Thanks."

"That fellow, Cannon Ball Lem," the Marquis enquired — "he never recovered from your blow?"

"He was pretty well done before," David replied. "They took him to hospital, but he died in two days. I'm not going to be a hypocrite. I think I had the strength of a Samson vouchsafed me for ten seconds that night, and if I hastened his death, I'm glad."

"What a wiping up!" Glendower reflected. "That chap they call Reuben?"

"He'll hang, and serve him right," David announced shortly. "They got nearly all the other leaders of the gang, smashed the place to pieces, and one of the most treasured possessions of Scotland Yard to-day is Tottie Green's safe. That terrible old man had a record of everything the Lambs have done, every exploit, every robbery, every killing, since the gang was formed."

"One of the greatest criminals of the century," the Marquis observed.

David set down his empty glass.

"I can't help thinking," he pronounced, "that there was really something great about Tottie Green. He was a dirty, cruel, grasping old man, with evil habits, and he signed the death warrant of any person who crossed his path without remorse or a single second's pity. To see him, as I have done, sitting and swilling wine or spirits, smoking foul tobacco, planning crimes with the water running from his eyes, one might think of him as a terrible old toad. Yet, remember this: he looked after that girl — his partner's girl — lavished money on her schooling, did everything for her. She was the soft spot of colour in his life. Remember this too: he was proud of his gang,

he loathed like nothing on earth the thought of a squealer, yet the moment he knew that Reuben had killed her, think what he did. He finished with life. He went up to the place the very name of which he detested, to Scotland Yard itself — he, Tottie Green — and there he sat, and one by one he gave them all away. He brought down the pillars of his own temple, if any man ever did, and he sent Reuben to the gallows just because of that girl. No, there was something great about Tottie Green, Marquis!"

The Marquis replenished the glasses.

"The man who achieves one act of greatness," he declared, raising his own to his lips, "sometimes atones for a life of crime."

"He hated me," David said. "He planned to do me to death. He was a murderer and a brute, yet I too am going to drink once more to Tottie Green."

"And I too," Sophy echoed, "because, after all, he saved David for me."

The toast was "Tottie Green!"

THE END